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EL USO DEL CÓMIC EN LA CLASE DE INGLÉS EN
PRIMARIA

USING COMICS IN ENGLISH CLASSES IN PRIMARY
EDUCATION

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RESUMEN

Este Trabajo Fin de Máster trata de ofrecer una propuesta didáctica basada en los cómics en las clases de inglés en educación primaria. Aunque consideramos que los cómics pueden ser herramientas útiles en el aprendizaje del inglés, nos parece que no han sido suficientemente usados en estos niveles. Este trabajo estudia las posibilidades pedagógicas que ofrecen los cómics y ofrece tres propuestas didácticas con distintos enfoques. Empezamos con una revisión del término “cómic” y las diferentes concepciones del término, donde incorporamos una breve historia del medio. Después incluimos reflexiones y experiencias sobre el uso de los cómics y las ventajas que conlleva. Antes de presentar las propuestas didácticas, incluimos un capítulo sugiriendo consejos para el diseño de actividades. A continuación describimos tres diseños de actividades acompañados de la reflexión sobre su uso en una clase real. Nuestro trabajo concluye que los cómics son herramientas útiles y versátiles para los profesores de inglés. Para terminar, hemos elaborado un glosario de términos relacionados con el mundo del cómic.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Inglés, lenguas extranjeras, ILE, segundas lenguas, educación primaria, cómic, cómics

ABSTRACT

This master's thesis tries to offer an educational proposal for the use of comics in English as foreign language lessons for primary education students. Although we consider that comics can be useful tools to learn English, it seems that they are underused in this specific context. This thesis studies the pedagogical possibilities offered by this medium and offers three proposals of activities showing different approaches. We open this thesis with a review of the definition of the term “comic” and the different approaches to the term. Additionally, a brief summary of the history of this medium is added. Then, we encompass different reflections and experiences related to the use of comics and the advantages they provide. Prior to the proposal of activities, we include another chapter suggesting hints to designing comic-based activities. Afterwards, three activities are described and we reflect on the results of their use in a real context. Our work concludes that this medium is a versatile and useful tool for English teachers. Finally, we elaborate a glossary with terms related to the world of comics.

KEY WORDS:

English, English as a Foreign Language, EFL, English as a Second Language, ESL, primary education, elementary school, comics

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INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, the amount of comic-based productions on the mass media has grown considerably. Nowadays people seem to enjoy films and television series based on heroes and villains from the world of comics and some production companies are investing on them. Although films and series about classic comic heroes such as Superman or Batman have been broadcast during the last decades, at this current moment, possibly related to the use of the Internet to spread productions internationally in quite an easy way, it is not too difficult to find those kinds of series on television or uploaded to the Internet. Marvel and DC, the two greatest and best known companies devoted to the creation of comics, are providing us with tons of characters who are flooding customers with lots of merchandising.

Although the purpose of this master's thesis is not to focus on the reasons behind this popularity, it is important to realize that our students are immersed in that kind of world as their clothes, pencil cases or schoolbags can easily prove. Students wearing Superman's signature symbol on their t-shirts are not hard to find, as well as those schoolbags with the characters from animated series adapting classic superheroes such as *The Avengers* or *Spiderman*. These students may watch on television the adventures of the *Ten Titans* (a group of young superheroes from DC led by Robin, Batman's companion) or new and adapted adventures from *The Avengers* (a group of Marvel's heroes such as Ironman, Hulk or Thor) or *The League of Justice* (involving Batman, Superman or Flash among many other DC characters). Furthermore, youngsters and teenagers are likely to be paying attention to other adaptations of comics for elder viewers.



Image 1: An example of t-shirt with Superman's symbol from www.kiabi.es.

On television we can find several series based on DC characters while the ones from Marvel seem to prefer movies, although both kinds of media are getting popularity and the actors playing those heroes often become trendy on the net. To illustrate this point we could mention the example of series being aired in Spain at this moment as *Arrow* and *The Flash* (series which frequently cross-over between them) or other trendy series based

on the world of the heroes but not necessarily involving those classic heroes, such as *Gotham* or *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*. On the other hand, movies about Marvel heroes are continuously being produced and even remaking already existing not too old movies. Examples of the first, i.e. new movies about these kinds of characters, could be *The Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Antman* or follow-ups for *The Avengers* or *Ironman*. And, on the other hand, *Spiderman* and *The Fantastic Four* are examples of films that are currently recreating and adapting previous ones which were aired hardly a decade ago. Summing up, we have to realize that our students in primary education are receiving this kind of cultural products and that any educational proposal intended to be used in class should take into consideration these elements in order to be able to take advantage of their possibilities.

The purpose of this paper is to offer an educational proposal for the use of comics in class as they have a potential and complexity which no other media possess. In addition, the characteristics of this medium make it a really interesting tool to teach English as a foreign language as the contents usually involve a more informal register of language than what is usually found in ordinary lessons and the combination of static pictures and written texts provide students with a double input which may be of great use for them. To fulfill this purpose, this thesis has been organized following the structure explained below.

The first chapter is devoted to the conceptualization of comics. While looking for an adequate definition of comics, we have found that defining this medium is quite a complex issue. Some definitions can exclude or include products that are considered comics by some theorists but not by others. In order to reflect that complexity, that first chapter is divided into three sections. The first one shows simple definitions based on intuitions or simplifications. Examples of definitions given by kids or taken from English dictionaries are commented there. The next section delves into the difficulties of the definition. There we have included definitions from theorists on comics such as Will Eisner or Scott McCloud reflecting on aspects such as the use of ideas of “sequential art” or “juxtaposed elements”. Furthermore, as many of those definitions are related to historical products not “officially” considered comics which are quite similar to them in the way of using of pictures to narrate a story, a subsection about the story of comics has been added to show the reasons why some authors discuss the origin of comics. Finally,

the last section of that chapter shows some of the most complex and philosophical proposals of definitions suggesting ideas to go further in the creation of comics.

The second chapter of this thesis is devoted to the reasons why comics can be such a powerful educational tool. This section encompasses different reflections and experiences related to the use of comics and the advantages they provide when facing different situations. Among the several ideas included there, we can find references to different levels and situations and some reflections on the usefulness for students who can find ordinary reading troublesome.

After that section, a third chapter is included offering some clues necessary to consider when using comics as a didactic tool in order to pave the way for the proposal of activities. The importance of this chapter, despite not being too long, lies in the fact that these hints can be creatively used to design lots of different activities.

The fourth and last chapter prior to the conclusion is the proposal of activities. This chapter is opened with a reflection on the skills and language activities as they are described according to the Common European Framework of Reference and an explanation for the skills chosen in the activities accompanying this section.

As a final point, a conclusion, a glossary and the annexes have been added to close this thesis. The conclusion consists of a reflection on the results of this work and the experiential application in a real context of the activities designed. The comics and other descriptions necessary to understand the activities are contained within the annexes. Finally, a glossary of terms related to comics has been created and added before the annexes in order to provide the reader with some help with a vocabulary that can be quite particular to this medium.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING COMICS

This initial chapter is devoted to the definition of comics. As the proposal of activities is going to use several comics and tools related to them, it seems necessary to provide a reflection on the definition of this medium, an issue that involves several difficulties as several points of view can be found trying to provide a way of defining what a comic is and which forms of visual art can be considered comics.

Nevertheless, this defining complexity mainly affects highly complex approaches as the one taken by a member of the philosophy department at University of Minnesota (Cook, 2011), while many other simpler definitions suitable for an everyday explanation can be found. For that reason, the structure of this chapter starts with easier and intuitive definitions and reflections on them and continues showing and taking into consideration others in which the discussion about the nature of comics, specially focused on the idea of forms of sequential art, requires a thoughtful consideration and revision of several forms of expression through history. This step-by-step path finally takes the form of three main subsections.

The first and easier conceptions of comics are taken from definitions stated by kids and those that can be found in dictionaries, focusing the analysis on the main ideas provided for achieving an initial notion of comics. This initial step intends to set a starting point showing some usual and quite intuitive ideas that are valuable, since they are the most likely to be found in our primary education student when facing the idea of comics.

The next section focuses on definitions mainly stated around the idea of sequential art and the reflection on how some pictorial forms of art through history can be considered as comics or as some kind of ancestor to them. Many of the ideas that can be found in this section revolves around a chronological approach including mentions to the review provided by Scott McCloud of the world of comics which sets ideas usually mentioned by other authors reflecting on this issue (Berkowitz & Packer, 2001; Meskin, 2007; Cook, 2011; Maggio, 2007; among others). In addition, this section provides a brief history of comics including both ideas about printed comic books and comic strips like *The Yellow Kid* and previous pieces of art. Finally, in this section ideas about the differentiation of

graphic novels and comic books can be found as this issue shows some subtle differences which might be interesting to cover.

The third and last main section of this chapter is the one involving a higher level of complexity and reflection as the papers studied here focus on discussing the existing conventions about comics and try to suggest steps that can be taken in the future to advance as a form of art. Nevertheless, the main purpose of this section is to show that criteria to define comics may involve the creation of forms of art theoretically considerable as comics but quite distant from the intuitive definitions and considerations of comics. Despite not being interested in the use of these definitions when working with these resources as teachers, the existence of issues in well-established comics' series, like *Batman #663*, not following the usual conventions justifies the need of including these reflections as there are chances of coming across them or others which could rebut the self-established conception of comics.

By the use of this structure, we will be able to firmly build the bases for a useful definition of comics from the point of view of a teacher but without forgetting the complexity of the reality and the possibility to face new forms which could be considered as comics in the future.

SUBCHAPTER 1.1: INTUITIVE DEFINITIONS

“When I was a little kid I knew exactly what comics were.

*Comics were those bright, colourful magazines filled with bad art, stupid stories and
guys in tights”*

(McCloud, 1994, pp. 2)

Most of us have some ideas about comics and what they are since we have been exposed to them through our life. Depending on your age and preferences, the appreciation of this medium can vary, but there are some basic and clear ideas which make the classification of creations (as comics or not comics) easy and intuitive. As shown in the statement opening this section, comics’ theorist Scott McCloud offers us the vision of comics he had when he was a child and, although he later explains that while being in 8th grade he changed his mind about them, it seems to be a good point to start with.

The main advantage of the definitions provided by kids is that they are concise, clear and suitable to offer ideas that other sources could omit as how comics interact with their emotions and feelings.

In McCloud’s statement we can find an initial idea based on some simple points. Those ideas, which are contrasted with other statements some lines below, can be summarised as follows: comics are comic books or magazines, with poor quality and revolving about only one kind of characters. According to the description provided of the format and outfits, and taking into consideration that McCloud lived his childhood in the sixties and seventies which is considered the Silver Age of comics (when Marvel and DC superheroes comic books became extremely popular), we can deduce that he is talking about superhero comic books, colourful publications involving characters typically using tights.



Image 2: Example of the cover of a comic book from the Silver Age.

McCloud’s statement tells us more about his feelings than about comics themselves as he was mainly criticising superhero comics. However, that quote expressing his ideas

directly to the point suggests that we should pay attention to definitions given by kids. For that purpose, definitions of comics stated by school kids and gathered from surveys (Rollán Méndez, Sastre Zarzuela, & Fernández Bolaños, 1986) have been translated from Spanish into English by the author of this thesis trying to keep the original sense. Each statement is accompanied by the age of the pupil as definitions grow complex as age increases.

- (1) *“Comic are some characters drawn on a paper and they make us laugh” (6 years old)*
- (2) *“A comic is a cartoon strip¹ with drawings and they tell what happens in the drawings” (7 years old)*
- (3) *“A comic is a cartoon strip or an action shown with drawings. They can be horror stories, adventures, etc.” (9 years old)*
- (4) *“A comic is a comic magazine². Letters are inside circles to know who is speaking and there are drawings in cartoons where characters going to work are drawn” (10 years old)*
- (5) *“Comics are strips written in panels and illustrated with drawings, usually with an amusement purpose” (12 years old)*
- (6) *“Comic is a way of expressing feelings through expressive drawings accompanied by an explanation” (13 years old)*

(Rollán Méndez et al., 1986)

The main idea appearing in all of these statements is that comics use drawings to fulfil a purpose. However, that purpose is described differently in each case. The first, fifth and sixth involve some kind of reaction in the reader as they intend to share and provoke some kind of feeling while the other three only focus on the narration of a story. Although not much can be deduced from such a small sample, we can already suppose the existence of two main elements: a narrative purpose and some kind of interactive reality with the reader.

¹ Here, the original term “historieta” has been translated as “comic strip” as the original term may involve either strips or full books (Real Academia Española, n.d.)

² The term “comic magazine” is used in the place of the original term “tebeo” (Real Academia Española, n.d.)

Nevertheless, other clues can be found here. Though the presence of pictures is something that seems completely necessary, an accompanying text is not always referred to. While the second and sixth statements mention that the text acts as an explanation of the images and others do not mention any text, it is quite interesting that only number four includes the idea of a text in a circle showing who is talking and what that character is saying (i.e. conversation balloons or bubbles). From these ideas we can guess that the relation between text and image in comics involves some particularities. In addition, the use of panels, another element quite representative of comics, is implied in some way in (2) and (3) when talking about strips and is explicitly mentioned in (4) and (5).

Finally, the last point that could be interesting to mention is that most of them seem to refer to something quite specific as they describe the content of comics in quite a restrictive way. The first and the fifth kids focus on humour, the third mentions horror and adventures comics and the fourth seems to remark that they deal with everyday stories³.

Interestingly enough, many of these elements can be found in dictionary entries where ideas about humour, a narrative sequence, pictures and some occasional mention to the form of the text are usually included, although well-known dictionaries organize these ideas in a more defining way. However, it has to be acknowledged that definitions of the word “comic” usually include the idea of “comic strip”, so the combination of both entries are needed to study the meaning.

The first dictionary that we are going to consider is Merriam Webster as it offers us both definitions and dates showing the first use they can track. The terms searched, in order, are “comic”, “comic book” and “comic strip”. Since in the definition of comic only the last entry refers to our object of interest (the other referring to comedy and amusement) and it simply says “of or relating to comic strips” (“comic”, 2015), it has been excluded and only the other definitions are shown below.

³ This is quite an interesting point as this is the only case when in the original version one of the kids uses the word “tebeo”, a word derived from the name of a comics magazine “TBO”, and the only one referring to everyday issues.

- Comic book (1941):
 - o a magazine that is made up of a series of comic strips.
 - o a magazine containing sequences of comic strips

(“Comic book”, 2015)

- Comic strip (1920):
 - o a series of cartoon drawings that tell a story or part of a story
 - o a group of cartoons in narrative sequence

(“Comic strip”, 2015)

In this case, the definition of comic refers to a magazine containing comic strips, which are defined with the ideas of pictures telling a story. This definition is quite simple and short and we can see no mention to its organization or text-image relation, elements appearing in the kids’ ideas of comics. However, the idea of sequence, appearing in the definitions of both ideas, will be of great importance in the attempts to define comics by theorists in the next subchapter. Additionally, although this is not the moment to focus attention on this issue, the dates of the first known uses of the words can give us an idea about the history of comics.

The next definitions are taken from the Collins dictionary by looking for the meaning of “comic” and “comic strip” as the first definition again recalls our attention to the second term.

- Comic:
 - o a book or magazine containing comic strips
 - o (usually plural) (Mainly US & Canadian) comic strips in newspapers, etc.

(“Comic”, n.d.)

- Comic strip:
 - o a sequence of drawings in a newspaper, magazine, etc., relating a humorous story or an adventure.
- (“Comic strip”, n.d.)

In this case, we find that this source widens the definition, including both books and magazines containing comic strips, defining them in relation to humorous or adventurous stories. Although the idea of a sequence of images telling a story can again be found, the restriction of topics excludes other kinds of stories.

Finally, the last dictionary entries included here are taken from the Cambridge dictionary using the same criteria as in the previous one. As there are some differences between the previous dictionaries, looking for another additional definition may help us with the defining problem.

- Comic:
 - o a magazine, especially for children, which contains a set of stories told in pictures with a small amount of writing
- (“Comic”, n.d.)

- Comic strip:
 - o a short series of funny drawings with a small amount of writing, often published in a newspaper
- (“Comic strip”, n.d.)

One of the most noticeable contributions of the first entry is the specification of children as the main target of this medium. While the previous definitions do not refer to this idea, here we find this point clearly included. The idea that comics are targeted to children is something that may be deduced from the initial quotes from kids. Choosing these subjects as a source implies that the authors assume that they know what comics are, so we could consider that researchers are implying that comics are written for children or, at least, that

children are the target of some kinds of comics. Additionally, McCloud states that he got hooked when he was in 8th grade (McCloud, 1994, pp. 2), so it seems that it is true that comics have quite an influence on youngsters.

But that is not the only new point mentioned as here we can also find in two different entries the idea that comics involve a “small amount of writing”. Up to this moment, taking into consideration the dictionary definitions, we could have supposed that comics have no text despite our intuition.

Summing up, comics seem to be sequences of drawings telling stories about different issues that can or cannot contain text in some particular format (small amount, in balloons) usually appearing in newspapers or magazines. The main purpose of comics, attending to the definitions gathered, could be a form of entertainment particularly targeted towards young receivers.

Although this definition may help us when starting a study of the medium of comics, there are several ideas that have been put aside (despite being somehow referred to above) and that we should take into consideration, as they will be used in the next sections and they have already been mentioned: panels and text.

Panels seem to be some kind of unit that divides a strip in smaller parts also called cartoons (Silverman in Elkins & Bruggemann, 1971) and they contain the action of the comic. While two of the kids’ statements mention these elements, the other initial explanations do not even refer to them. This is quite surprising as they seem natural to this medium (as we will see later), but it may tell us that this is not as clear as it could be expected. Also, panels add another level of complexity to the world of comics (McCloud, 1994, pp.92; Karp & Kress, 2012, pp. 3; Maggio, 2007, pp. 237).

And the second point is the use of text. Text in comics, up to this point, has been described, when appearing, taking two main forms: letters in a balloon or an explanation of what is happening in the pictures. However, as those statements shown before suggest, the narrative responsibility lays on the pictorial base, an idea that is going to be developed in the next sections.

SUBCHAPTER 1.2: ADVANCED DEFINITIONS

“This is why I think it’s a mistake to see comics as a mere hybrid of the graphic arts and prose fiction. What happens between these panels is a kind of magic only comics can create.”

(McCloud, 1994, pp. 92)

As we can see, preconceptions and intuitions about comics greatly differ according to the source focusing the attention on different points. Even dictionary entries include or exclude aspects such as the use of written texts showing that the defining issue is rather complex. It could be argued that those definitions change because they come from sources based on the common use of the word, and users may have some everyday functional assumptions and that, looking into the specialised world of comics, a greater uniformity could be found. So, in addition to our interest in building a definition for our purposes, an attempt is made to check if there are unified criteria or the diversity of points of view makes this difficult to accomplish.

This section offers a review of several definitions offered by authors targeting the world of comics. In order to set a logical structure to show these definitions, we follow a chronological order to show them. In addition, this section ends with a brief summary of the story of comics as some definitions consider that the evolution of this medium may change and challenge set definitions (McCloud, 1994, pp. 23) and that new publications may provide or support new ones (Cook, 2011).

The first attempt to define comics included in this review is the one provided by Coulton Waugh in his book *The Comics* (1947) where he studies the evolution of comics. The interest of this work is based on the fact that it is the first study of comics we have been able to access for this thesis.

“Comics are a form of cartooning. The special feature of this latter is that it jumps at the reader picture side first –you see the situation. In the strips, the writing is a side explanation which the mind picks up, often without being aware of the process.” (Waugh, 1947, pp.14)

This idea is the basis of Waugh's theory on the success of comic strips. He suggests that the fact that images are able to transmit more information than a group of words makes the process of reading strips faster and implying less effort, so this medium takes advantage of a shortcut to the reader. However, this author goes one step further and mentions three elements that comics usually have.

"[...], comics usually have (1) a continuing character who becomes the reader's dear friend [...]; (2) a sequence of pictures, which may be funny or thrilling, complete in themselves or part of a longer story; (3) speech in the drawing, usually in blocks of lettering surrounded by "balloon" lines."
(Waugh, 1947, pp. 14)

One of the most interesting points about these elements is that some of them were referred to or implied by the kids' statements or the dictionary entries in the previous section, such as the presence of text and speech balloons or the sequence of pictures. In addition, two new ideas appear in this quote. The importance of the character and its relation to the reader and the idea of stories that can be autonomous or part of a longer one are aspects that will be specially dealt with in following sections and chapters. Moreover, the second of these two new ideas, i.e. the continuity of comic strips, has even led to classify comic strips as totally self-contained, quasi-self-contained, short sequence and continuous sequence (Elkins & Bruggermann, 1971).

However, Waugh's analysis of comics does not end there as he continues showing the readers another term related to comics and he explains that it is usually used among comics' consumers.

"The world "funnies," so popular today with the majority of people who actually read comics, was originated by the kids in the early 1900's. They referred to the big, gaily colored comic sections, which they looked forward to reading every Sunday, as the "funny papers"'" (Waugh, 1947, pp. 14)

Although these lines could seem of no real use, the importance of this idea in Waugh's work is undeniable, as he uses it to conceptualise the meaning of comics.

“This word “comics” has had a multiplicity of meanings. It meant almost any amusing, humorous drawing in the day before the comic strip; but when the new form, with its immense popularity, rose over the American horizon it pre-empted this word, and this is the sense in which it will be used in this book – to define the “funny paper”, comic-strip side of cartooning, which has a special definition and a special story” (Waugh, 1947, pp. 14-15)

This quote states that comics became something different from the original cartoons so some attention to this differentiation should be paid. This idea is shared by other authors such as Silverman (Elkins & Bruggemann, 1971) who separate comics from cartoons and offer a definition for comics including this idea:

“a comic strip is a series of pictures in a related order. A single picture is called a cartoon” (Silverman in Elkins & Bruggemann, 1971)

Nevertheless, Waugh’s words may also explain and anticipate that the meaning given to “comics” depends on the point of view of each author interested in working with this medium, so different approaches to the term can be found. In addition, even terminology may be quite confusing as different languages use completely different words. An example of this issue is shown by Rodríguez Diéguez (1988) when mentioning the followings words to refer to the same reality: *fumetto* and *fummeti* (the Italian singular and plural forms because of the smoke-like speech balloons), *tebeo* (from the name of the TBO magazine) or *historieta* in Spanish or *bande dessinée* in French.

This author also provides us with some definitions of comics while trying to show that ambiguity exists despite the fact that comics seem refer to a simple to identify reality (Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988, pp. 17-20). As those definitions are taken from a Spanish source, their translation into English is done by the author of this thesis.

“narrative by means of a sequence of drawn images” (Coma 1979, in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988)

This first definition focuses on the description of the medium, quite similar to definitions taken from dictionaries, paying special attention to the narrative, a point of view shared by other authors:

“[Comics] are a narrative form whose structure does not consist of only one system but two: language and images” (Baur, 1978 in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988)

This definition is commented by Rodríguez Gutierrez saying that the use of language suggested refers to the verbal system, though he admits that the term used by Baur is quite imprecise. However, these ideas of the double system (images and texts) are also shown in works from other authors who take into consideration elements that could appear in a comic like panels or phonetic signs.

“Graphic story made of images or cartoons catching successive and different moments of its action according to a script containing the full text of the narration, translated into its plastic appearance by a draftsman and composed in its purely literal aspect by a letterer” (Laiglesia, 1969, in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988)

“Comics are a narrative sequence made of cartoons or squares in which linguistic texts or some signs representing phonetic expressions can be integrated (boom, crash, bang, etc.)” (Manacorda de Rosetti, 1976, in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988)

Although these authors offer ideas about the form that the text may take in comics, there are still other characteristic elements that one of the kids mentioned that can be found in definitions describing comics: the speech balloons.

“Illustrated story whose action happens in several cartoons where the text said by each character is enclosed in a balloon or bocadillo coming from each mouth. They [comics] can be divided in strips or episodes published in successive issues of newspaper or magazines, or can appear as single book or comic-book” (Bubern, 1973, in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988)

As we can see, the descriptive point of view tends to focus on the relation of images and text as they are interconnected in such a way that the image of a balloon serves as indicator of the character speaking or the order of interventions. In addition, the next quote gives a

reflection on the relation between these two elements relating them to Roland Barthes' theory of anchorage and relay of pictures and texts when combined.

“Narrations combining drawn images under certain typical conventions with literary fragments. The relation between picture and text tries to be complementary; the role of anchor texts tends to be reduced to give importance to relay texts. The standardized nature of its realization and, above all, the industrialization of the production and distribution modes characterized comics as such” (Ramirez, 1975 in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988)

Finally, the last quote taken from this review focusing on the descriptive approach of the definition is the one that follows these lines and which seems to show some of the ideas developed by Waugh before.

“Comics are a narration made by means of pictures drawn on a paper, and enchaind by the more or less usual presence of the same characters, by the temporal continuity caused by the inclusion of texts and by the implicit logic of the narration itself, printed on a large number of copies and spread by the social channels corresponding to its own nature” (Muñoz Zielinski, 1982, in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988)

Although these definitions focus on a descriptive approach, the importance of mass communication is referred to, and taken into consideration as one of the most basic characteristics of comics.

“Comics are, on the one hand, a mass media unthinkable without this mass circulation; on the other, a signification system with its own and specific purpose, having or not mass circulation” (Loras, 1976, in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988)

Moreover, some authors suggest and develop functional approaches where the definitions of comics are related to the purpose of comics as mass communication instead of offering a formal description of the medium.

“Comics are a cultural product, ordered from above, working according to all the mechanics of the hidden persuasion, assuming in the receptor an

evasive position stimulating the paternalistic whims of the organizers [...]. Thus, most comics portray the implicit pedagogy of a system and they work reinforcing existing myths and values” (Eco 1973 in Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988, pp. 17)

However, for the purposes of this chapter, those definitions of comics may seem to be outdated as many of them were established in the seventies, and the evolution of the genre may have produced new ideas and studies on this field as McCloud pointed and we mentioned at the beginning of the section.

Following this path, we find a definition of comics gathering some of the ideas exposed before stated by Thomas Inge, known for his studies on comic art and popular culture.

“open-ended dramatic narrative about a recurring set of characters told in a series of drawings, often including dialogues in balloons and a narrative text, and published serially in newspapers” (Inge, 1990, 661)

As we can see, this definition does not greatly differ from the others previously seen although they serve to build others where quite a differentiation can be found. A clear example of this situation can be found when Scott McCloud creates his own definition of sequential art, referring to comics, based on the following definition provided by Will Eisner:

"The arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (Eisner, 1990, pp. 5)

McCloud uses the idea of sequential art to analyse, add and change concepts in order to create a new definition for comics involving all the kinds of comics existing without including things that are not considered comics (McCloud, 1994, pp. 4-8). During his analysis he admits that comics and films both could be sequential and visual art, so spatial juxtaposition is suggested as one idea that the definition should include. Also, he considers adding the notion that the sequence is made on purpose and changes the idea of art (which involves some type of judgement) for static images, although then he realises that this definition (“static images arranged in a deliberate sequence”) may describe

words, as letters are static images, so finally he adds the idea of pictorial images and creates the following definition:

***Com·ics** (kom'iks) **n.** plural in form, used with a singular verb. 1. Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer. (McCloud, 1994)*

Moreover, McCloud argues that the main advantage of his definition is that it leaves an empty space for all the possibilities that the world of comics could offer in the future. He additionally suggests that his proposal may serve to predict facts about future productions based on the things that are not included:

For example, our definition says nothing about superheroes or funny animals. Nothing about fantasy/science-fiction or reader age. No genres are listed in our definition, no types of subject matter, no styles of prose or poetry.

Nothing is said about paper and ink, No printing process is mentioned. Printing itself isn't even specified! Nothing is said about technical pens or Bristol board or Windsor & Newton finest sable series 7 number two brushes. No materials are ruled out by our definition no tools are prohibited.

There is no mention of black lines and flat colored ink. No calls for exaggerated anatomy or for representational art of any kind. No schools of art are banished by our definition. No philosophies, no movements, no ways of seeing are out of bounds. (McCloud, 1994, pp. 22)

Although McCloud's books have been frequently referred to as a reference in many studies (Berkowitz & Packer, 2001; Meskin, 2007; Cook, 2011 and Maggio, 2007 among others). This definition has been criticized (Meskin, 2007, pp. 370) for two main reasons: being too wide ("considering too many things as comics") and too limiting (involving the intentions of the comic creator in the definition).

Finally, the latest definitions of comic will be shown in the next section as the authors challenge previous definitions of comics trying to argue that the pictorial condition could not be necessary to be a comic. Those definitions will use a conditional structure based

on the last definition shown in this section. It dates from 2005 and is provided by Hayman and Pratt in a conditional form:

“x is a comic if x is a sequence of discrete, juxtaposed pictures that comprise a narrative, either in their own right or when combined with text” (Hayman & Pratt, 2005, in Meskin, 2007)

This kind of conditional definitions will prove of use when proposing the new and challenging ones as this formulation serves as a criterion to determine whether an object of study is a comic or not.

Nevertheless, after talking about comics and defining them, there is another term that may arise when thinking about this topic and it is quite well known because of the awarded Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*. Graphic novels are creations sharing several features with comics making differentiation between them quite difficult if possible.

An example of this difficulty is shown in a comic-form article by Yang (2008) when mentioning debates at comic conventions arguing that grouping short stories or being fiction or non-fiction may be conditions determining if something is a graphic novel and not a mere comic book. This author solves this issue by exposing that, from his point of view, a graphic novel is a comic book needing a spine because of its thickness. He adds that this term is a political term intended to give the medium of communication of comics a more literary point of view, making them more desirable. As explained by Karp and Kerp (2012), this term “make[s] comic books seem more sophisticated or to possess a higher degree of literary merit” (Karp & Kress, 2012, pp. 4).

It also seems that graphic novels have even been considered a genre, although this idea has been refuted (Karp & Kress, 2012) as genre refers to content, style or subject, and graphic novels can be about any of them, making them a format and not a genre. However, Karp and Kress also argue that comics are to blame for this situation as comic books have been commonly related to the specific genre of superhero adventures. And, when referring to definition, these authors say that both of them, comics and graphic novels, are quite indistinguishable as both share the idea stated by Eisner about sequential art. In addition, they refer to the fact that most graphic novels in the United States of North

America “are published by the two biggest comic companies: Marvel Comics and DC Comics” (Karp & Kress, 2012, pp. 4).

However, these two authors (Karp & Kress, 2012, pp. 4-6) mention some differences that separate comics from graphic novels. One of the more popular ones is that the content of the latter is more sophisticated and mature than comics, although the fact that some works considered as graphic novels are reprinted collections of comics makes this idea rather useless. Another differentiation suggests that comics are open-ended while graphic novels tell a complete story, or, at least, offer some kind of closure. Nonetheless, even these ideas seem quite doubtable, and the final conclusion given by these authors can be read in the following fragment taken from their article:

“Put simply, comic books are floppy and graphic novel are not. Comics are bound with staples and usually run twenty-two pages (though they can run up to one hundred). Graphic novels are bound like novels, hardcover or paperback, and usually run upward of sixty-four pages (though they do sometimes run down to forty eight pages). Both formats have a range of physical dimensions (though more so with graphic novels) and so we’re really better off not bothering with those. [...] So, by and large, you are safe identifying a graphic novel with this rock solid, nonabstract, definition of physical form, eschewing the content for means of definition.” (Karp & Kress, 2012, pp. 6)

Summing up, this part of the section has shown that defining comics is not an easy issue as different approaches and attention to different elements can be found, but one of the main points justifying this situation could be the history of comics. And, for that reason, we have decided to add a summary of the history of comics and comic-like art forms that may help to clarify these difficulties.

1.2.1 Brief history of comics

It has been stated by several experts such as Waugh (1947) or Rollán, Sastre and Fernández (1994) among many others that the origin of comics dates from 1896 (specifically February 16th) with the *Yellow Kid* created by Richard F. Outcault appearing in the *New York Sunday World*. On that date, the character described in this way appeared:

“These kids framed a central figure, a strange creature who, though evidently a boy, appeared to have passed through the major experiences of life in the first six months. Though small, he was important-looking. His head, bald, with flap ears, had a wise, faintly Chinese face, and he looked directly into the reader’s eyes with a quizzical, interrogative smile, half timid, half brash, as if he understood perfectly well the portentous event which was happening through him”. (Waugh, 1947, pp. 2)

This character appeared again one month later again looking at the reader and with words written on his nightgown as a medium of communication, and since that moment he was present in newspapers’ strips weekly becoming a well-known character for New Yorkers and setting the bases of comics. In 1897, a book reprinting the previous *Yellow Kid*’s appearances was published starting what is considered the beginning of the *Platinum Age* of comics (Coville, 2014). However, we need to review other works that can be considered ancestors of comics or even comics which did not get enough attention from readers.



Image 3: An example of panel depicting the Yellow Kid.

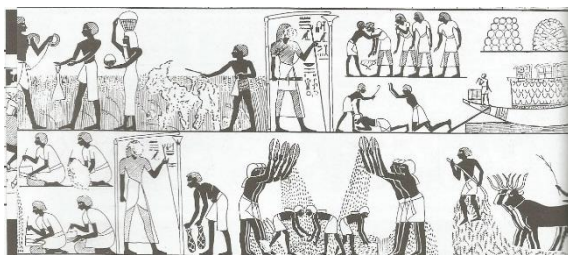


Image 4: Fragment of the pictures found at the tomb of Menna provided by McCloud (1994, pp. 14).

McCloud (1994) suggests a possible ancestor in the Egyptian culture. While investigating Egyptian culture, he came across a work of art in the tomb of *Menna*, painted over thirty-two centuries ago depicting a sequence of images structured

in an ascending zig-zag form showing different locations and people, without frames but using the subject matter as clear divisions.

Following a chronological order, McCloud found that, in the eleventh century, a tapestry was produced in France showing details of the Norman conquest of England using a sequence of images, the *Bayeux tapestry*, which included inscriptions written in Latin.

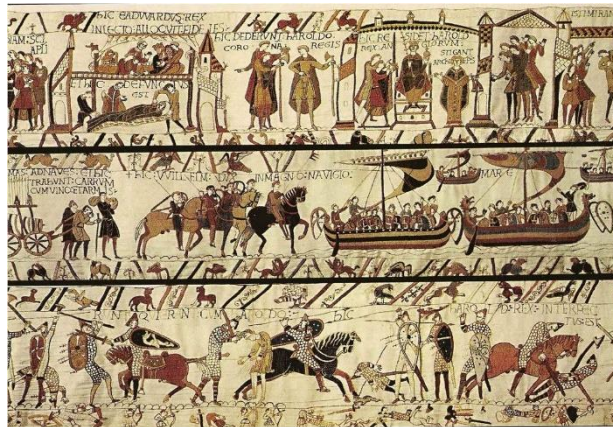


Image 5: Bayeux Tapestry shows a sequence of historical events with Latin inscriptions.

The next example of comic-like productions introduced by this author is a pre-Columbian picture manuscript found around 1519 by the explorer Hernán Cortés. This work narrates a story descending in zig-zag and McCloud states that it is readable following the same strategies we use when reading comics.



Image 6: Part of the Pre-Columbian manuscript provided by McCloud (1994, pp. 10).

These examples seem to show that, at the very beginning, ancestors of comics were used by powerful members of the royalty to illustrate historical information. However, the invention of printing allowed this kind of works to spread, such as “the tortures of Saint Erasmus”, described in McCloud’s words as “a very popular character” around the year 1490. In addition, another example of story narrated by images (using six plates in this case and designed to be viewed side-by-side in sequence) was created by William Hogarth and published in 1731: *A Harlot’s Progress*. This strip serves McCloud to

explain and illustrate that the sophistication and the popularity of this medium made it necessary to create new copyright laws to protect this form of art (McCloud, 1994, pp. 17).

In 1837 a book called *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck* was published in several languages in Europe and it has been considered either the father of comics (McCloud, 1994, pp. 17) or the first comic book (Coville, 2014). This work includes panels and uses the combination of words and pictures to tell stories and its author, Rodolphe Töpffer, used the same technique to create other graphic novels, although McCloud argues that this author was unable to appreciate the potential of its invention.

So the ancestors of comics were there when the *Yellow Kid* arrived. However, other authors can be considered as founding fathers of this medium besides Richard Felton Outcault. As explained by Waugh (1947, pp. 3-6) James Swinnerton with *The Little Bears and Tigers* published in the *San Francisco Examiner*, Rudolph Dirk with *The Katzenjammer Kids* in the *New York Journal* and Outcault in the *New York World* created weapons in the battle for popular attention which proved to be so successful that this is considered the beginning of the comic strips.

Finally, to end this revision of the history of comics, we are going to use some lines to mention the modern ages of comics, using for that purpose Coville's work as our main source (Coville, 2014; Petty, 2006).

- **Platinum age:** A period starting in 1897 with the *Yellow Kid* until the apparition of superhero comic books, including the beginning of well-known comics and characters such as the first Mickey Mouse comic book, *Tarzan*, *Peanuts*, *Flash Gordon*, *Popeye* or *The Phantom*. One of the main characteristics of this period is that they were mainly intended for adult readers and published in newspapers.
- **Golden age:** This age is said to begin in 1938 with the first number of *Superman*. The popularization of superheroes seemed to be so attractive for kids that a great amount of characters famous in our days were born here. Some examples could be *Batman*, *The Human Torch*, *Captain America*, *The Flash*, or *Wonder Woman*.

- **Silver age:** Starting around 1956, this period starts with the great publishing companies Marvel and DC trying to bring back comics after the drop caused by the critics and the attack from Dr. Frederic Wertham to the comic industry⁴. One of the main facts in these years is the arrival of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby to Marvel, who, with the help of other authors, created several superheroes and superhero teams. *The Fantastic Four, Spiderman, the Avengers or The X-Men*.
- **Bronze age (or Post Silver Age):** An age starting in the 70's introducing some new factors to the world of comics such as the relaxation of the CCA, the assassination of innocent and key characters (e.g. Gwen Stacy from *The Amazing Spider-Man*), crossovers between Marvel and DC or the creation of anti-heroes like *Wolverine* and *The Punisher*. This age is supposed to end coinciding with the creation of a comic book worth mentioning because of its influence, popularity and commercial success, *Watchmen*.
- **The modern age:** From the 80's to this moment, there seems not to be a clear dividing line. This age seems to be influenced by reboots and changes in the commercial interest of the two main publishing companies. One example of these changes could be the interest in the TV and filming industry developing characters from the original comic strips to adapt to the new situations and receivers.

As we can see, the world of comics and products surrounding comics is still developing and the contemporary situation may represent a new evolution in this reality. The incorporation of ICT as a creation tool of new forms and the re-popularization of superheroes could be an interesting point to focus attention when studying comics although that clearly exceeds our expectations.

⁴ A phenomenon that led to the creation of the Comics Code Authority (CCA) to establish some criteria intended to prevent comics from encouraging juvenile delinquency (Perez Fernández, 2009)

SUBCHAPTER 1.3: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS

“Our attempts to define comics are an on-going process which won’t end anytime soon. A new generation will no doubt reject whatever this one finally decides to accept and try once more to re-invent comics.”

(McCloud, 1994, pp. 23)

As we have seen, defining comics is a complex issue. Although many definitions have been stated and discussed, as Scott McCloud says in the quote chosen to open this section, the process of defining comics is still evolving.

Most of the definitions consider that comics involve pictures, but there are some critics like Roy T. Cook (2011), who question the pictorial thesis (i.e. comics need to have pictures). Although it is not quite likely that teachers will get involved with a non-pictorial comic, as the possibility exists, it seems necessary to pay some attention to this issue.

One author suggesting the possibility of non-pictorial comics is Aaron Meskin (2007). According to him, this kind of comics could be “composed of a sequence of nondepictive images along with text in some format” and mentions an example of a cartoon showing what could be considered a comic without pictures and still being a comic.



Image 7: Example given by Cook from Gary Larson's "Ghost Newspapers".

However, his thesis and example has been criticized by another philosopher studying if comics do require pictures. Roy T. Cook (2011) argues that Meskin is giving a strange example of non-pictorial comics which is “an example of a comic that depicts a character reading comics that Meskin takes to be pictureless” and that he fails to offer a real example or a description of how a pictureless comics could be.

Cook still continues studying the possibility of pictureless comics, though he states that a counterexample to the pictorial thesis of comics showing such a comic without pictures has not still been created, but he provides an example of a comic that, according to him, almost fulfils his purpose: *Batman* #663.

Batman #663 has some particular facts that make it quite interesting to analyse, as it may shake preconceptions and definitions of comics. Cook describes this issue basically as a prose short story illustrated with details that do not help to propel the story. At least one small image can be found in every page accompanying the written text, so this example may defy the intuitive definition of comics.

However, this author tries to answer the question of whether this issue is a comic or not. He states that rejecting this issue as a comic requires some argumentation. Moreover, he proceed to deeply explain why he contends that this issue is a comic.

Summing up, he states a mereological definition of comic after analysing volumes that are usually considered a single comic (although they involve several other self-contained stories). His experimentation suggests that what he calls strong and moderate pictorial thesis⁵ are false and that the weak thesis is the one working, so he suggest the following definition of comic:

If x is a comic, then x is a part of some y such that (1) y is a comic and (2) y consists of or contains a sequence or sequences of pictures. (Cook, 2011)

His intention with this argument is to show that a mereological definition may challenge any assumptions of necessary conditions, such as the presence of pictures, and he states that “any genuine condition for being a comic will likely be rather complex” (Cook, 2011, pp. 295). Furthermore, this definition seems to serve as an answer to Meskin’s complaints about his disaffection with extant definitions as he stated that procedural or historical forms were of no use when analysing comics (Meskin, 2007, pp. 376).

Finally, we can see that the quote opening this section seemed to anticipate the possibility of creating or discovering new definitions for comics. Interestingly enough, Cook ended his work suggesting that the creation of a pictureless comic as a part of a series could be an extra step in the way of artistic experimentation (although he admits that he would not buy it) in an attempt to re-invent comics.

⁵ Strong pictorial thesis: If X is a comic, then X consists of a sequence or sequences of pictures.
Moderate pictorial thesis: If X is a comic, then X contains a sequence or sequences of pictures.
Weak pictorial thesis: If X is a comic, then X involves a sequence or sequences of pictures.
(Cook, 2011, pp. 286)

SUPCHAPTER 1.4: CONCLUSION

“However much we may try to understand the world of comics around us, a part of that world will always lie in shadow, a mystery.”

(McCloud, 1997, pp. 23)

This chapter shows that defining comics is not an easy task, as many elements and ideas can be taken into consideration. Even when looking for the origin of this medium there are several works whose inclusion can be discussed. As we can find in the third section of the chapter, new creations may challenge the previous definitions of comics and lead to the elaboration of new conceptualizations for this medium.

Although having all these aspects in our mind may seem too complex when deciding to use comics in class, as our students or colleagues may find and question whether a specific book, magazine or work of art is a comic or not, it could be useful to use these concepts in class. In addition, the historic review offered may be a guide to the world of comics and provides us with information about the evolution of this medium, leaving space to new possible creations.

Furthermore, this chapter involves a terminology that will be used later so, in order to make it easier to understand these terms, the glossary added to this work may be of help. Additionally, as in the next sections we will be devoting our attention to the use of comics in class, involving reasons and suggestions of activities, not taking into consideration the existence of such a wide variety of views could be considered careless and may make it difficult to understand some of the ideas shown in this thesis.

However, for the purposes of this thesis, our definition of comic is practical and considers a comic a sequence of pictures in panels narrating a story with the possibility of including texts contained in balloons or squares. The decision of not involving restrictions of topics and purposes is based on the idea that creativity may be one of our main interests when working with comics in class.

CHAPTER 2: REASONS FOR USING COMICS

“Autobot leader Optimus Prime often used the directive "Transform and roll out!" to rally his troops and focus them on the myriad challenging jobs before them”

(Carter, 2007)

According to what has been stated before, we may, as teachers, assume that some of our current or former students read comics and enjoy them as a medium and that they would appreciate using them in class as learning activities, but that seems to be a weak reason from a pedagogical point of view. Although it can be argued that in groups with a high percentage of students used to reading comics and loving them those characteristics may justify their use, a study on the pedagogical implications of this medium is needed in order to support the proposal of activities given in this thesis.

In this chapter we provide reasons justifying the use of comics with pedagogical purposes intending to show the benefits when working with young learners. These reasons and argumentations are not only centered on the field of language learning and teaching, but also in other fields of knowledge. That is why this chapter is devoted to showing the points of view of several authors explaining and arguing the potential of this medium. Most of these experts have experimented and used comics in class so their experiences are the main source of the conclusions.

The first part of this section shows that comics can be useful for general learning and explains the benefits of the codes used in this medium to convey information in the reader and the ways in which comics may help students with different needs. The interest of this section revolves around the idea that the use of comics can be interesting not only when learning languages but also when trying to develop other faces of the education for young students.

That first idea progressively leads us to focus our attention on advantages for language learning as comics provides us with material which can be used to promote not only reading, but other ways to improve the learning process of a language, both mother languages and foreign languages.

SUBCHAPTER 2.1: GENERAL USE

The quote opening this chapter refers to an idea stated by Carter encouraging teachers to use graphic novels to change and improve teaching and learning. His reflections seem to summarize and introduce some of the advantages that comics can provide as class tools:

When English teachers "transform and roll out"⁶ their prior notions of literacy and graphic novels, they transform their English classrooms and their students and move toward reaching new, more inclusive potentialities.

(Carter, 2007)

These words talk about the potentialities of comics and graphic novels to change the way that languages are taught involving both their own methodologies and the students. But to consider this a valid idea, we should take into account several aspects about the functions that comics can fulfill.

One of our main concerns when thinking about the use of comics in class is the question of whether they are useful for educational purposes or not. In order to answer this question and to find reasons supporting the use of comics, a bibliographic review was carried out and one publication was found where the author specifically answered this initial question (Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988, pp. 10-13). He states that comic books have been one of the main sources from which he has learnt throughout his life, even more than from other media. However, he adds that there is a chance of de-educating by using inadequate materials. According to the experience of this author, comics can teach anything if they are used as a medium of communication: taking advantage of the sequential narration using pictures, many complex processes can be easily visualized and understood. In addition, in this text from the eighties, he considers that this medium is still in its beginning and that its possibilities are almost limitless. Although he points out that a certain degree of complicity is needed for the reader to use the potential of comics, suggestions of the uses given to the comics accompany his affirmation: comics have shown to be useful when recruiting soldiers or to encourage those in the battle front. He also suggests some of the other potentialities such as teaching and educating, advertising

⁶ This is a command usually used among Transformers (robots able to switch from an anthropomorphic form to a vehicular form) meaning that it is the time to change into their (often wheel-based) vehicle mode and to move out on a mission.

or boosting assistance to church. He explains that, from his point of view, didactic uses of comics could be fabulous and effective if using good quality materials. For instance, he suggests having a look at some biographies written as comics in what he considers a really exceptional outcome.

Other general pros of comics in relation to kids could be the following, taken from a source written in the forties (Strang, 1943) in order to show that the positive side of comics has been studied for several years:

- Comics are useful as a modern folklore based on the Greek and Norse myths.
- They offer the kids possibilities to overcome their limitations in their imagination.
- They can be used as mental catharsis.
- A reading experience that they enjoy while adding new vocabulary

However, many arguments against comics can be found and most of them seem to be present in numerous reflections, as many of the articles included below try to answer and refute those statements. In order to offer both types of assertions, we are going to start showing a summary of these taken from the same source of the benefits described in the previous paragraph (Strang, 1943):

- Comics may replace other more desirable readings.
- The pictures could be used as the only way to follow the story, avoiding reading.
- The unreality of the stories may be of no use in the real world.
- Reading experience through comics does not progress.
- Bad quality of the art appearing in the comics.

When reflecting on these affirmation, we can see that a worry about the attraction that comics may produce in kids is one of the reasons argued, as it is suggested that this factor may distract the attention of kids from other more convenient material. But we should focus on the reasons why this happens. In this case, Strang offers her own answers to this question.

One of her answers is that comics relieve kids from the monotony of life. As comics show them different places and adventures so different from their everyday experiences, kids can immerse themselves into a fantasy world and keep the troubles and worries away from them for a while. Although this idea could be quite negative if taken to the extreme,

a certain degree of relaxation and evasion from situations which otherwise they cannot struggle with is a truly necessary condition for the kids' development.

Also, she suggests that some kind of cliffhanger effect adds interest in comics as the reader wants to know what is going to happen next, so this may be a way to encourage kids to read further. From these words we can imply that there is a potential in developing readers by using comics as a medium.

Finally, the last advantage of comics suggested by Strang can be understood related to the other two previous factors. She states that comics are a form of relaxation for kids. On the one hand, the purposes and the effects of this medium may create some kind of positive emotional environment but, on the other, the kind of reading involved in comics is quite interesting.

Strang suggests that the possibility of following the story in pictures with small amounts of text may allow poor readers to start reading a simple medium which could serve with a transitional purpose leading to the reading of other media such as books appealing to the same elements (i.e. adventures, surprise, humor or action). In addition, the form taken by comics, and graphic novels, seems to be perceived as "cool" by students which, once introduced to this medium, may feel quite attracted to it (Gorlewski, Krickovich, & Gorlewski, 2011, pp. 106).

In addition, the combination of written texts and visual code is one of the main advantages of this medium above others. Williams (2008) suggests that the fact that none of the elements present in the comics such as words, images, layout and story dominate the reading process helps students to develop visual literacy, as they can decode these texts in several levels. In this medium, each reader can "choose" to some extent which elements to read or notice first and how to understand the relation between images and words. Furthermore, when analyzing a comic, a reader may read the words prior to looking to the images or even considering the whole page as an initial step (Williams, 2008).

This visual component added to the textual one is specifically one of the factors which could explain the attraction towards this medium according to Yang (2008). He states that his students, in this case high school pupils, love visual media as "after all, they're

immersed in it” (Yang, 2008, pp. 186). This characteristic of the medium, the shared visual and textual narration, achieves a bridging purpose between images and texts, a fact that has been referred by many well-known authors in this field of knowledge. Eisner (1990) describes the form of communication in comics as relying on a shared visual experience between the creator and the receiver, promoting in the reader both an understanding of “the image-word mix and the traditional deciphering of text”. This idea suggests that comics involve an additional kind of reading added to the traditional form or reading, so instead of replacing other forms of reading, the use of this medium adds another one. In addition and supporting this idea, Eisner argues that reading comics can be considered reading “in a wider sense than usual”, as the combination of elements has achieved a “successful crossbreed of illustration and prose” involving practicing several interpretative skills as the “regiments of art (e.g. perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) and the regimens of literature (e.g. grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other” (Eisner, 1990, pp. 7-8).

This idea, the level of complexity of reading and analysis, is another of the benefits attributed to comics, making them a quite complex medium instead of a simple and childish one, as can be inferred from the arguments against them. This factor serves, according to Versaci (2008), to develop high order thinking skills like the analytical and critical ones. He explains that, when using comics in class, it is usually necessary to go beyond what is written and understand many other factors affecting what appears on the page. The elements from traditional reading need to be related to the pictorial accompanying element, making this process more complex. Moreover, comics are not only a way to develop critical thinking towards the comics’ page in front of their eyes, but that critical thinking can be spread to the rest of the reality. It is stated that youngsters need to be given weapons to “deal with persuasion in the age of images” (Schwarz, 2006, pp. 61-62) as they are exposed to tons of visual media such as films, television or websites. However, this idea is not new:* authors back in the eighties argued that reading comics means a kind of “intellectual gymnastics” needed to identify and fight against the manipulative potential of the mass media, while additionally bosting fantasy and creativity (Rodríguez Diéguez, 1988, pp. 23).

Returning to the importance of the presence of the media in which students are involved mentioned by Yang, not only the gapping function is an advantage of the comics, but also adding a complex medium that may “catch students off guard in a positive way” (Versaci, 2001) and promote participation and engagement in class. According to Versaci, comics and graphic novels take the visual nature of the medium as a way to “put a human face” to what is being narrated, showing the characters in the illustrations and thus making them nearer than what could be felt in “traditional” literature. In addition, experiences told by other authors (Gorlewski et al., 2011) mention that using graphic novels with the purpose of studying cross-cultural experiences lead them to a particular situation: the students asked for other graphic novels and to borrow some of them despite the fact that they were of no use for the teachers’ academic purpose. Those students explained that they were interested in reading the graphic novels “because they looked cool”. The situation described demonstrates that this medium may boost interest in reading in students otherwise not being so enthusiastic.

The interest of comics as an engagement tool lies in the fact that many students use comics for fun and that teachers should use that situation to create a contact zone between students and teachers (Carter, 2007). Carter states that many young teens enjoy reading *Manga*, comic books mainly from Japan with a quite different structure from western comics, and, though he explains that the characteristics of the pictures may be confusing, teachers should be familiar with some of the best-known series, adding that “Manga is to teachers today what music videos were a generation ago: something of import to students that we shouldn’t ignore, even if we might not ever “get” it” (Carter, 2007, pp. 50). So, according to this author, including all kinds of books and literary formats may demonstrate that the class is a place of diversity where discussion is an option.

Another advantage related to the way comics are structured in relation to image and text and the way they are interrelated is the permanent nature of the messages represented. This is one of the main differences with other visual media such as movies and animation, as comics and graphic novels are permanent in time (Yang, 2008), while, as explained by Yang, the others are time-bound as what is being narrated is gone as time passes. In contrast, comics are not bound to time, but in space as the narration progresses when you move your eyes across the page, so it is really easy to stop at any point and to go back to

previous moments in order to resume some of the parts of the narration, thus making this medium space-bound, while keeping the visual component.

Furthermore, this form of bounding space and narration, both visual and textual, provokes the existence of a great cognitive space for the reader to interpret what is being read (Maggio, 2007). The form in which words and pictures are related in a comic book creates a kind of alternative attention going from words to pictures and vice versa. This alternation of codes causes some kind of absence of one of them while the attention is focused on the other and thus several reading trajectories are involved (Schmidt, 1992, in Maggio, 2007). The eyes scan the panels in several forms, zig zag, spiraling or resuming from another previous point to find new meanings

Besides, considering all of these facts about comic books may promote critical thinking about other issues such as literary selection. Versaci suggests the consideration of comics as a truly literary form. In his paper (Versaci, 2001) he mentions three ideas revolving this point. The first one is that discussing with students whether this medium could be considered as literature is a way to “expand their reading horizons” and to try to teach our students the difficulties of literary selection as comics “are not typically perceived as literary”. The next idea mentioned is that students feel more engaged in classroom activities because of that personal consideration of comics, so it is likely that they would be more active in discussions. Finally, Versaci explains that these ways of using comics may help teaching students that literary presumption is dangerous. When treated with seriousness, this medium shows that critical thinking is necessary in order not to consider inferior some forms of art or communication and narration just because of their appearance on popular conception since, acting in that way, may prevent them from accessing or discovering new literary possibilities.

Other advantages of comics used with educational purposes have been suggested in relation to other factors not so related with the languages and structure used, but with other aspects that can be developed through comics. In the lines below a couple of them are mentioned.

The first one is related to tolerance. Some authors (Gorlewski et al., 2011) suggest that using graphic novels may be used to boost tolerance as they may show cross-cultural

experiences to reach a better understanding of situations like immigration. For that purpose, it was decided to use *The Arrival*, “an award-winning wordless graphic novel about a man who leaves his family to create a new life in a foreign land” (Gorlewski et al., 2011), which happened to encourage some exchange students to share their own experiences. However, Rodríguez Diéguez also warns us against the risks of using comics when talking about tolerance. He explains that, just as they can be used to promote tolerance, they can also promote hate by representing stereotypes or recalling hateful experiences in a wrong way. This author explains that troublesome topics treated in a proper way may lead to develop a relativistic perspective showing that the world is quite a complex place.

And the second advantage is related to creativity. As stated before, understanding comics requires a creative effort to understand what is being narrated in the story and some of the proposal of activities, that will be shown later, will demonstrate that comics may be used to work with the students’ creativity. In a study about the use of educational cartoons in primary education (Olaniyi Alalba, 2007), the results show that “pupils that are taught using the creative teaching strategy perform significantly better than those that use the conventional, non-creative strategy”. The author of the article adds that combining these strategies with a creative environment can boost a growth in the students which would allow them to face the challenges of the future, providing them with “high ordered skills needed for exploratory, experimental and creative learning”, skills such as closure (creation of full images from partial ones, constructions of a sequence or filling gaps), narrative density (identification of some of the several layers of information in a single panel) or amplification (scaffolding as a form to reach a comprehension of the message communicated by the combination of words and images) (Little, 2005 in Karp & Kress, 2012). Furthermore, if we relate this experience with the previous reflection on the improvement in critical thinking and analyzing skills, we can see that authors consider comics as an important tool for mental development.

One more general advantage of comics included here is a response to critics referring to weak plots or the unreality of the characters and stories narrated (Strang, 1943, pp. 342). Although it has been shown that there is a great variety of comics and graphic novels dealing with lots of issues and that selecting the proper ones is something necessary when

interested in using them in the classroom, Strang also argues that comics can be used with a transitory purpose encouraging children into reading and that, once they start, they may advance to other forms of reading. Rodríguez Diéguez suggests that both media are compatible and can live together because comics are not substitutes of other media and “the preference of books over comics has not too much sense: where there is a comic there will be a book, a disc, a snack or something else”, referring to the fact that these media has no preponderance above others, although he admits that comics seem to be useful to initiate students into the audiovisual culture, fostering in that way the critical skills mentioned above.

Some experiences can show that comics used even for high school and college students can bring about other benefits. A couple of experiences (Schwarz, 2006) describing the use of comics for analyzing literary elements (conventions, character development, language structures...) and developing writing and research skills may be of interest.

A mid-school teacher from Oklahoma used graphic novels to study *Romeo and Juliet* by means of telling his students to create their own graphic-novel version of the play as a review. This approach made students solve problems and decide about literary elements.

The other experience selected for this part reflects an example of the use of the work *From Hell* from Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell about Jack the Ripper. This teacher used the novel to talk about aspects of sensationalism in literature and cinema showing graphic images of violence and sex in what is described as “a well-told and disturbing, thought-provoking work, what any English teacher would want from any work of literature” (Schwarz, 2006).

Finally, the use of comics has been studied as beneficial to some particular kinds of reader who can feel more confident towards their skills and thus we could create in them a desire to move on to other formats (Karp & Kress, 2012).

- ***Slow visualizers***: to whom word descriptions are troublesome to create mental images of what is being narrated. These readers may find it easier to understand narrations structured as comics.
- ***Reluctant readers***: those lacking motivation to read books that may not initially consider comics as proper books so they do not loath to read them.

- **Visually dependent:** readers considering that books lack the motion and visual component which their immersion in the mass media world provides can feel more engaged towards reading.

Summing up, comics seem to have an almost incredible potential as referred by Karp and Kress in the next quote chosen to end this section:

““Because the images and the words are both working to convey the same story are, comics provide a type of literacy support no other medium does” (Little 2005). Children who read comics growing up even show a larger vocabulary and a better understanding of verb tenses than children who do not (Smetana 2009). Indeed, countries with high national literacy rates also tend to have a thriving comic culture, one that is respected by adult interest and has authority figure approval, such as Finland and Japan (Little 2005)” (Karp & Kress, 2012, pp. 7)

SUBCHAPTER 2.2: TEACHING LANGUAGES

While the previous paragraphs intend to show that comics are useful in a general approach to education, we are going to focus our attention on the use of comics to teach foreign languages, although some ideas such as benefits related to the learning of vocabulary have been stated before. A clear example is Smetana's statement affirming that comics provide kids with a wider vocabulary and increase the understanding of verbs (Karp & Kress, 2012).

One of the linguistic skills which can be benefited by the use of comics while learning a second language is writing. Sometimes students who are able to read without problems find quite troublesome to write and they explain that, despite having ideas, they do not have enough writing skills to structure a logical text (Bledsoe in Yunus, Salehi & Embi, 2012). Bledsoe explains that those students usually ask her for permission to "draw a picture when they are writing" so they can support their ideas by those images. Considered in that way, elaboration of comics may provide students with scaffolding to the writing process, and have the additional advantage that they can be easily printed or shared through the Internet therefore boosting motivation. Furthermore, using comics as a medium to promote writing in another language also forces students to make decisions going beyond the mere text without neglecting the teaching of grammar or punctuation as well as many other concepts (Yunus et al., 2012).

Other experiences seem to support this idea. Frey and Fisher describe a situation using the first six panels from *Hydrant* (a comic narrating the story of a woman who must carry pails of water filled at a fire hydrant to prepare her baby's food). Looking to the pictures the students brainstormed vocabulary they would use to describe the situation and, later, they wrote the story. One of the points that was soon realized was an overuse in the word 'say', so the teacher prepared a class dealing with other speech verbs. These authors also talk about using "photographs from a formal party" to describe a fictitious event, using a comic-type story as a base to produce those texts. They end the paper used as reference here explaining that comics and graphic novels have a great power to "engage students in authentic writing" as this medium can be used to scaffold writing. In addition, Fisher and Frey state that their "students became not only better writers but also more knowledgeable

consumers of ideas and information” (Frey & Fisher, 2004), summarizing ideas that have already been stated above.

Another benefit provided by comics that makes them a really interesting teaching tool is the kind of language they use. It has been stated that comics usually involve real-life language and culture (Davis, 1997). As comics are an element from the western culture and they carry many aspects that otherwise could go unnoticed in a foreign language class (as stated by Brines) they prove themselves really useful as an educational tool. Moreover, using more relaxed language than the one from other more “traditional” texts allows teachers to use a more informal linguistic register as well as slang and puns in the studied language (Brines Gandía, 2012). These contents may have a great potential for students to learn the language and the culture as comics are easy to read and understand. Brines suggests that the double coding of comics, i.e. pictures and words, may show clothing, lexis, onomatopoeias and other cultural elements. This author (Brines Gandía, 2012) summarizes that the medium of comics used for teaching has the following advantages:

- It is a concise material, with linguistic richness, easy syntax and truly accessible for any kinds of reader.
- It deals with current topics and those that, despite not being so, keep validity and are easy to incorporate to the class.
- Its graphic component allows reading of gestural meaning, movements and images.
- It encourages the development of several skills: comprehension, interpretation, summarization, temporal sense, investigation...
- It promotes a relaxed class environment.
- It motivates students.

Most of these advantages are really interesting for teaching and learning because comics offer a kind of text involving particular characteristics that make this medium attractive to students; comics offer a comprehensible input and engage the reader, thus increasing the amount of time that the students use in reading, helping in that way to improve the comprehension of texts and motivating the students to move on to other reading materials (Derrick, 2008). Once the effect of comics in producing texts has been shown, now we intend to illustrate the effects of comics in comprehension.

One of the conditions for improving the reading comprehension depends on the repetition effect (Liu, 2004) and comics offer a kind of repetition and complementation between text and word that is quite unique to this medium. This is quite an interesting idea, as results from Liu suggest “that the reading comprehension of the low-level students was greatly facilitated when the comic strip repeated the information presented in the text.” (Liu, 2004, p. 238).

Another argument supporting comics’ value to develop reading comprehension can be found. Many children who are not able to read easily long texts are readers of comic books as the support of the pictures helps them to follow the story and to pick up some words (Jacobs, 2007). If paying attention only to this fact, we could consider that comics are a transitory medium to other texts but Jacobs suggests that the motivation of poor readers is one of the benefits. He explains that this is a limited view as comics are much more complex. This author states that using comics to boost comprehensive skills does not reject the “word-based literacy instruction” but supports it including images and those other literacies involved (linguistic, audio, visual, gestural and spatial) needed to understand these cultural productions. The main advantage of multimodal texts such as comics, according to Jacobs, is that the production of meaning is an active process taking into consideration even personal experiences and interests. In addition, he suggests that this way of active comprehension is the reason why high-order thinking skills are boosted, as students develop a critical view of the medium, promoting the creation of active subjects rather than passive consumers while negotiating the meaning of what they read.

These ideas relate also to visual literacy. As comics convey information from the use of several codes, mainly pictorial and textual, using comics to develop comprehension involves the visual literacy of students (Munguía Vásquez & Ramírez Romero, 2011). The pictorial code in comics uses specific symbols so it is necessary to understand the meaning of those elements, elements which can be used later to create new messages using those conventions. An example of this situation proposed by Munguía and Ramírez could be the presence of a couple of crosses in the place where the eyes of a character would be in order to indicate death, arbitrary symbols that are only understood if students have been exposed to this medium. Other examples of these codes could be the wavy

lines to indicate smoke or bad smell if flies are added. This is then a useful tool to represent the physical world surrounding the story narrated by the comic (Derrick, 2008).

The importance of visual elements accompanying the text is so great that it has been demonstrated that the presence of “visuals in texts facilitate readers’ comprehension and memory” (Liu, 2004) . This author, Liu, affirms that the activation of verbal and nonverbal mental representations is a tool to create inferences and relationships among contexts in order to generate strategies to understand and perceive texts. The results in Liu’s paper⁷ suggest that “low-level students reading the high-level text with the comic have better recall than their counterparts who read only the high-level text without the comic” (Liu, 2004), thus making comics a really interesting tool in class. However, Liu admits that, for high-level students, comics may be a distraction shifting attention away from the specific contents in the text.

Interestingly enough, this conclusion from Liu agrees with another obtained by Yunus explaining that using digital comics is a way to promote writing in English for low-level students.

In addition, there are other many elements and skills that can be taught through comics that are summarized below (Davis, 1997) in order to show that the potential of comics is really wide and full of possibilities:

- To describe characters with adjectives.
- To learn synonyms and antonyms.
- To introduce cultural onomatopoeias (as they change in different languages and it is necessary to know the appropriate ones for the target language).
- To practice direct and reported speech (as comics promote the use of dialogues in balloons or bubbles and then students need to practice how to refer to them).
- To identify cultural roles and stereotypes (as comics can both show a real picture or a humorous one).
- To improve listening by reading or describing panels and asking the students to identify the right picture and thus practising pronunciation when describing.

⁷ These students were given high-level texts. For the experiment the text was presented with or without a comic strip. Then, immediate recall of the text was tested.

- To identify current problems (social, political, economic...).
- To introduce paralinguistic as comics tend to be rich in this kind of content because of the kind of language used; this is a part of the target language that otherwise could be rather difficult to teach despite the high frequency in everyday speaking.
- To practice verb formation.
- To practice the narration of a sequential narration by using temporal transitions (first, later, finally...).
- To recognize some informal forms of expressions such as *gonna* or *wanna*.

Finally, the last reflection for this chapter revolves around the idea that comics, despite all the advantages listed before, are underused for teaching purposes. One of the main observations of the author of this paper is that the amount of information about the use of comics for teaching English as a foreign or second language in primary education is not as abundant as for other forms of teaching. However, as we realize that personal impressions may not be so accurate, mentions to other scholars are included below.

Munguía and Ramírez (2011) affirm that comics have been underused, in general teaching and specifically in English teaching, despite its great attractive. They suggest that the main reasons could be the difficulties in the creation of comics adapted to the changing and diverse needs and characteristics of the students although they also propose the use of computer programs to help creating and designing comics. An interesting point about the idea of comics underuse can still be found decades before, as some authors mention that “comic books were so educationally unsound that their use would lead to mental stagnation” (Ellman, 1979, and MacGregor, 1996, in Davis 1997), although Davis (1997) later admits that this medium has to spread to all groups of ages and levels of society. Additionally, Brines (2012) adds to this discussion that even in handbooks for teaching and learning Spanish as a Foreign Language the presence of comics and comic strips is small and inadequate.

CHAPTER 3: HOW TO USE COMICS

Once we have realized that comics can be educational tools with a great potential to develop several skills in the students, we need some guidelines to use these tools within the context of a class. It has been stated before (Munguía Vásquez & Ramírez Romero, 2011) that the use of comics in teaching English as a foreign language is not a usual tool so, when deciding to use comics, there is a need to take several aspects into consideration in order not to affect our students in a negative way.

Brines suggests that some topics can be too troublesome depending on the background of the students, as some issues dealt with normally in one society can be taboos in others, so comics need to be carefully on this occasion we are not going to work with this possibility (Brines Gandía, 2012).

Another factor suggested by this author is the visual acceptance of the pictures shown in the comics. Some of them can be too aggressive or not appropriate for our students such as violence or nudity in different degrees. That situation could destroy all the enjoyment and motivation which comics can provoke when they are well chosen according to the parameters of each group of students.

These factors force teachers to investigate the interests of our students prior to the application in the classroom (Rigg, 1976), so that the lesson can be contextualized and comics can be adequately chosen for the kids. Rigg's preparation for the use of comics in an English class with his students starts listening to their natural conversations. Then, he writes down the ideas expressed. Those ideas will be the basis of their activities, and so he can prepare comics dealing with topics which are likely to work with his group.

However, not only the contents of the comics are elements to be taken into consideration as there are many other aspects necessary to create a convenient environment and to make the most of this tool.

Although there is not a great amount of information related to the use of comics in the context of English as a Second Language in Primary Education, some indications can be found related to several levels and contexts similar in nature. For example, some previous considerations can be found in the paper from Jaume Brines (2012). This author focuses

his attention on Spanish as a Foreign Language lessons but the indications suggested for designing activities related to comics can be useful for any context, since most of them are not really limited to that kind of students but are good for any comics-based lesson.

The first suggestion given by this author is that activities using comics are complementary to the general teaching, so their length should not exceed thirty minutes, although depending on the general timing and available hours that can be lengthened or shortened.

Lessons also need to be adapted to the characteristics of the students, such as level of skills or personal interests, in order to mix language and culture without unbalancing both communicative and grammatical skills. Brines pays special attention to the importance of practicing communicative skills structured in a logical sequence.

Another important point is the attractiveness of the materials. According to Brines, appealing materials can be more motivational for our students, so using or creating attractive materials reinforces the idea of personalizing the lesson plan for the students.

The activity should avoid individualism. As this author considers that the communicative approach is the best way to use the potential of comics, he advises designing activities based on couples or bigger groups; besides, the teacher has to be aware of the importance of the explanations in order to obtain as much effectiveness as possible when developing the activity. Additionally, Brines (2012, pp. 3) quotes Rojas Gordillo to explain the importance of the rules and explanations as “from their clarity and dynamism depends to a large extent the success or failure of the activity”.

The last tip given by Brines is that assessment processes should not have a punitive interest: the teacher should integrate them as a part of the process, for feedback. As he states that the interest of the activity is the use of the language, any step in the punitive direction may render the activity almost useless.

One of the most interesting things about these ideas is the fact that they can be found to some extent present in several teaching experiences using comics as a medium. Some of those experiences have already been mentioned while others are being mentioned for the first time.

Rigg (1976) uses the potential of comics to teach English to young students of English and he proposes several techniques while constantly insisting on the importance of incorporating “as much of the children’s spontaneous speech as possible”. When working with primary schools students, he uses puppets to play the dialogues, as this way of acting helps them to easily identify who is saying what; in addition, he explains that puppets are useful for them to practice in pairs. Then, once he decides to move forward to written dialogues, he uses strips created by him or taken from newspapers with empty balloons from the mouths of the characters. On some occasions, the teacher himself writes or guides the dialogues but, in others, the students themselves can determine and write the conversations. In this last example, the student’s own creations, are usually a source of motivations as they “proudly take away with them their very own comics, which they read later to their classmate, teacher and parents” (Rigg, 1976, pp. 296). Additionally, Rigg states that these strategies are suitable even for first and second grade students as the use of dialogues can be an interesting initial reading material and these texts can generate writing opportunities for the class.

Sometimes, discovering those topics or aspects related to comics that could be more interesting for the students is not as easy as simply listening to them, as in the case of older students or when working with not much time available, in which case the natural speech and conversation may not produce the expected results. A suggestion to compensate or minimize this situation could be the one suggested by Leonard. This author affirms that he uses comics to “increase students’ participation in the reading and writing world” (Leonard, 1975) especially when he is interested in teaching the classics in literature. Prior to using comics, he starts with a discussion about comics, an easy way to receive feedback as students are caught off guard (Versaci, 2001) in a positive way.

However, after a teacher has enough previous information about the kind of contents that the comics used in the lesson plan should include, the variety of activities that can be designed is rather wide and mostly depends on the target language’s points of interest intended for the lesson plan, as many possibilities and approaches can be taken. As we have seen in the previous chapter, contents taught by means of comics can go from linguistic features such as grammar to other cultural aspects.

What seems to be a good summary of the several possibilities which comics can offer to language teachers is shown in the quote below:

Comics can also be used as great and noteworthy reading/writing exercises in a number of ways. There are a number of well-known exercises which you can easily adapt to your classes. These include the 'classics' 'add-a-panel', 'fill-it-up', and 'sort-it-out' in which students respectively can expand a strip's storyline with their own panels, script a wordless comic, or re-assemble idle panels in order to re-create an existing narrative. (Dony, 2009)

The ideas shown in that paragraph can be found in different experiences in order to design the activities adapting them to the level of the students. In the example of the use of the comic *Hydrant* mentioned before (Frey & Fisher, 2004) the students were provided with part of the story (the first six panels of the nine that make up the story) so they imagined and created their own endings for the story. Using this wordless narration students put into practise vocabulary and writing (both a narration of the shown story and the creation of their own endings).

Other examples mentioned in previous sections are those from high school and university levels in Oklahoma (Schward, 2006). With the ninth-grade students, comics were used to recreate the story of *Romeo and Juliette* by means of comics. This activity was intended to show the points that the students consider more important and to generate a personal review of the play while facing creation problems and enhancing creativity and comprehension of the visual narration. On the other hand, the use of comics made by the college professor was intended to be a trigger to discuss sensationalism and the ways it is exploited.

As we can see below, there are several ways in which comics and graphic novels can be used in class for achieving several purposes. Comics have been shown to be a complex medium combining several kinds of codes conveying information using words, images and symbols specific to this medium making them a complex and useful tool for teachers in order to teach several aspects of the target language. Additionally, the interest of young readers in them provides teachers with a potentially appealing and motivational tool that can be used in several ways. Those ways can be summarized in two main approaches:

using already created comics to fulfil the educational purposes or creating comics. The process of their creation can vary from the teacher creating the material for his lessons (Rigg, 1976) to the student making their own comics (Schwarz, 2006) so, depending on our interests, we will use several designs in the following section in order to show some possible examples of activities that can be taken to the classroom taking into consideration the initial guidelines stated in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: TEACHING ACTIVITIES

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), there are four basic kinds of language activities that can be found related to a learner's communicative competence: production, reception, mediation and interaction. Among those processes, the first two are considered the primary and basic ones as production and reception are necessary previous steps to be able to mediate and interact.

As shown before, comics have a great potential to develop most of those skills in the students as the complexity of the medium allows for a great variety of possible activities. Our proposed activities are going to focus on production and reception, although a presence of the other two can be found as explained below.

Interaction, as explained by the Framework, is based on the use of language to construct a conversational discourse co-operatively, with the speaker acting as producer and receiver with other interlocutors. This kind of language activities can be both oral and written, so interaction can be found in several forms. In our case, although comics could be used to interact or to boost interaction, as in the cases of the debates in the teaching experiences mentioned before, we consider that one of the main contributions of comics to this process is their use to offer models of conversation. Due to the fact that comics usually reproduce conversations and dialogues, they can be used as examples. However, in the following activities this skill is put aside in order to focus on other skills.

The other type of language activity that we have decided not to focus on is mediation. This process involves acting as an intermediary between interlocutors unable to understand each other and can take several forms such as translation, interpretation, summarising or paraphrasing texts. Comics need, to some extent, the process of mediation since the codes used by the creator can differ from those known by the receiver, and many activities using comics can involve this skill (an experience described before used comics as a tool to summarize and interpret *Romeo and Juliet*). However, this approach has been considered not so relevant for the students targeted in the proposal of activities.

The Framework considers that productive and receptive skills are primary when learning a language, so their presence in activities for primary education students of English as a foreign language is natural. Comics, as a visual medium, are highly related

to reading and writing while their relation to speaking and listening can be less natural (although there is a possibility of using animated versions of the comics).

Some examples and tips for using comics to practice writing have already been mentioned in the previous chapter, so we have considered that the productive activities on which to focus our attention should be speaking. One of the reasons for this decision is the consideration that speaking is a complex skill for the students to practice on their own, while written activities can be planned leaving parts as homework. The other reason is the fact that the class timetable for these fourth year students and this year has a specific session once a week for English conversation; the class is split in two and the content is more flexible than the planning for the ordinary English lessons.

According to the CEFR, oral production activities are those in which the student produces a text orally towards an audience involving several activities such as reading aloud, speaking from written notes or visual aids or acting different roles. In our proposal of activities we use those ideas to design comics-based activities in which the students are intended to produce oral texts with different degrees of preparation and rehearsal according to their level of skill in the language, which is considered to be from A1 to A2 according to the descriptions of the levels provided by the Framework.

A1	Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places
A2	Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.

Table 1: Descriptors from the CEFR for A1 and A2 levels for oral production (Council of Europe, 2011).

Finally, receptive activities when using comics are clearly related to the reading process of the sequential narration involved. One of the particularities of this medium is the use of both words and pictures in combination to convey the meaning intended, so comics and words act as mutual aids to understand and transmit the information. In addition, the CEFR considers comic strips as a type of written text which learners can “receive, produce or exchange” (Council of Europe, 2011, pp. 93-95).

In the activities designed for this thesis, the focus of attention is placed on reading although listening is also involved as speaking is an important part of the activity. In fact,

the kind of listening reception involved, particularly in the second activity, can be considered an example of what the Framework considers audio-visual reception as the students receive both auditory and visual input. Nevertheless, the reading skill is going to be the main receptive skill involved in the activities described below. Our students, according to the description of the skills provided by the Framework, are considered to be able to face activities designed for levels up to A2.

A1	Can understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words and basic phrases and rereading as required.
A2	Can understand short, simple texts on familiar matters of a concrete type which consist of high frequency every day or job-related language.
	Can understand short, simple texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, including a proportion of shared international vocabulary items.

Table 2: Descriptors for A1 and A2 levels for reading skills (Council of Europe, 2011).

As a final reflection, the activities designed using comics as means for teaching and learning English have been adapted to the characteristics of the groups involved (described in the next section) in order to offer all the students activities with enough level of complexity. As levels in the same class can vary so greatly, the activities offer enough flexibility to be expanded or simplified to meet the needs of the students. Additionally, the use of web tools to create comics can help different kind of students to perform better as explained before (Yunus, Salehi, & Embi, 2012).

3.1 ACTIVITIES

The following activities have been designed following the indications mentioned before. These activities are adapted to the contents of a specific grade and year and have been created with a real group of students in mind. However, as described below, only the first of them could be taken to practice completely while the second was partially applied and the third has been left untested; the experience gathered can be considered useful as the feedback received was mostly positive.

The target students of these activities are three groups of 4th grade students, attending a public urban school in Santander. As the school is in the process of becoming bilingual, these students receive, apart from the ordinary English lessons, others in English (arts and science) and the group is divided in two once a week to practice English conversation in smaller groups (up to fourteen students).

In these groups, there is a wide variety of socioeconomic and personal conditions so different levels of English can be found in the same class. Most students have some basic knowledge of English, enough to express themselves or to understand class instructions, although other ones have higher skills (some students were taking exams in levels 2 and 3 of the Graded Examinations in Spoken English of the Trinity College). We could say that these groups as A1 groups with some A2 cases.

We intended to use the three activities during the four months period of school placement offered by the Government of Cantabria within the BIP program (acronym standing for professional initiation scholarship), although the day-to-day practice and the school year planning made it impossible to take all of them to class. In addition, attention to personal interests of the students and research on the kinds of comics, cartoons and activities they prefer (a basic factor to design class activities based on comics) took longer than expected. During this period several school-based events were planned, usually involving unexpected stops for rehearsing or delays in the beginning of the classes for religious events, thus forcing teachers to adapt their planning. Furthermore, each group showed quite noticeably differences such as the degree of class creativity, their diversity of interests or inner dynamics. On a very first moment, we paid attention to their clothes and school supplies in order to identify potential topics of interest. This observation

helped us to discover that they had some interest in cartoons and superheroes. Once this base was settled, we used informal ways to gather information such as informal talks about videogames they play or series they watch or suggestions of films they would like to use in class. These strategies finally resulted in the choice of the comics and tools used in the activities.

Although this process was successful according to their interest in the material chosen, the midterm arrival of the author of this thesis as a new teacher implied the need for some time to build the confidence necessary to have some real feedback. That confidence is necessary to avoid the answers they could think teachers are expecting (it seemed that sometimes students felt that they were being judged for the kind of cultural products they consume and that may encourage them to give more “acceptable” answers). This situation could lead us to a wrong choice of materials unable to motivate or engage our students, so we consider that the sacrifice of some of the activities and the adaptation of those used in class (explained in the charts describing the activities) was a worthwhile process.

Finally, to describe these activities, I am using a model of chart from another master’s thesis related to the educational use of comics (García Martínez, 2013) based on a model found in a publication from the University of Cantabria (González Lopez, 2007).

Activity 1: Family in comics ⁸ (Teen Titans Go)
Ages: 4 th grade (9-11 years old)
English level: A1-A2
Timing: 20-30 minutes
Aims: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand and use vocabulary related to family - To describe a family, their own or imaginary. - To learn and use colloquial expressions and idioms. - To encourage class participation using the foreign language.
Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading - Speaking
Methodology: <p>The page selected (shown in Annex I) from the comic is projected on the screen and the teacher introduces the characters. It is important to highlight proper nouns as they can have some difficulties understanding, since the names in this comic can be mistaken for vocabulary (Starfire, Wildfire, Blackfire, Tamarean, and Gordanians). For this purpose we use the images at the beginning of the worksheet (see Annex I) to introduce and show the characters.</p> <p>Then, the teacher asks the students to look at the comic and to describe the members of the Tamarean family using some key words. Those words are shown in the second exercise although others can be added as we have taken Starfire as reference because she is the middle sister (thus helping us to introduce “younger” and “older”).</p> <p>In the next exercise students look at the page without reading (we zoom out the comic to make texts smaller) and they try to explain what is happening with their own words. Then, the first three panels are read aloud by some of the students and the teacher</p>

⁸ For this activity we have chosen the fifth page of the issue #46 comic *Teen Titans GO!* (Sparrow, 2015), see Annex I.

explains the last panels of the comic as the use of past tenses (and their pronunciation) in the last two panels may be too difficult for these students.

The next activity emphasizes some expressions because of our interest in them and the teacher explains that they are expressions usually used in informal language (“the bad seed of the family”, “take over”, “just in case” or “to be crushed”). The students are expected to read the comic and find out the meaning of the expressions and link the two columns.

Later, we focus our attention on the family vocabulary mentioned before. The students talk about their families and those more creative can invent a relative who is “the bad seed of the family”. The teacher also encourages them to use some of the new expressions appearing in the story. To prepare this activity they can take notes on the blank family tree added on the back of the page.

Finally, the students are shown some panels taken from the rest of the comic and the teacher asks them to guess what is going to happen in the story. Those panels show different characters and different situations to encourage students to participate. Then the students are given the web address of the comic to let them check their guess.

Assessment of the activity:

This activity was taken to class by the end of the school year and close in time to activities related to the space and means of transport, so even terms such as “starship”, “rocket” or “shuttle” were used. Although the time for the activity was reduced to fifteen minutes and the activity had to be shortened, the results seem positive as the students were able to speak about their families and older and younger relatives as well as some examples of students using the expression “to be the black seed”.

In addition, students enjoyed the activity as they recognized the style of the comic from other similar drawings so their attention was caught from the very first moment and they were interested in more of this material.

Activity 2: Creating support comics
Ages: 4 th grade (9-11 years old)
English level: A1-A2
Time: 2 sessions of 20-30 minutes (creation and presentation)
<p>Aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To create a comic using web tools to serve as support for presentations based on dialogues previously elaborated by them. - To play a situation with several roles using comic-type images to support and aid the understanding and the presentation. - To understand oral presentations made by classmates with the help of visual aids. - To encourage the use of the foreign language with communicative purposes. - To be able to work in groups to prepare a presentation.
<p>Skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading - Speaking/Listening (minor, when listening to the classmates) - Writing (possible)
<p>Methodology:</p> <p>This activity is designed to be a follow-up activity for another one in which the students create a dialogue role-playing a tourist office. They have to ask and give indications to go to different places by different means of transport (see Annex II).</p> <p>Once the other activity has been done, the students create a comic which is going to be used as support for their role-play.</p> <p>Then, the students use computers to create a comic-like summary of the situation using the online free tools available on the Internet so the teacher can keep a copy and project it on the screen. This activity has been designed thinking of using of ToonDoo (available at http://www.toondoo.com/) as this webpage allows users to create and</p>

save comics only requiring a free account there (ToonDoo 2015) although other tools could be also plausible. However, this specific web-tool is easy and intuitive to use with only some simple instructions (see Annex III).

The first session is the process of creation and the second to the presentations so that students can receive help and attention during the creation stage. The comics can be continued or retouched at home.

Assessment of the activity:

Although the initial part of the activity has been taken to class (the creation of dialogues), the lack of time made it impossible to create the comic. The use of the role playing to show what they had written seemed to be received in a positive way and students were engaged in the activity. In addition, some minor experiences with some of these students using *ToonDoo* were also perceived as positive as they were able to create simple comics and to manipulate the elements available, although the wireless connection was not working as well as it should.

Activity 3: Role-playing comics (Calvin and Hobbes)
Ages: 4 th grade (9-11 years old)
English level: A1-A2
Time: 2 sessions (1 st :15-20 minutes; 2 nd : 20-30 minutes)
Aims: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand written texts. - To practice and use simple and continuous present tenses. - To encourage the use of the foreign language with communicative purposes. - To describe simple pictures with their current level of language. - To role-play strips reproducing the dialogues written. - To understand oral presentations made by classmates based on used strips.
Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading - Speaking/Listening (minor, when listening to the classmates)
Methodology: <p>For this activity some comic strips from <i>Calvin and Hobbes</i> are chosen according to the tenses appearing in them (simple present and continuous present) as the examples shown in Annex IV.</p> <p>Strips both printed and in a digital format are prepared taking panels separately for the lesson and keeping the full strips.</p> <p>The students, organized in clusters of four or five, are given a couple of strips with their panels cut and scrambled.</p> <p>They start describing some of the panels. Students are expected to create simple sentences using present tenses and the teacher can introduce the characters by their names.</p> <p>Later, pupils try to rearrange the panels to create the two different stories.</p>

Then, they explain the story and the whole class can discuss the order of the pictures and the meaning of any unknown word. Also, the strips can be explained in class if they are not understood.

Finally, the students role-play the situations of the strips (this stage is supposed to be performed in the second session so they can have extra time to practice or to prepare some props).

Assessment of the activity:

This activity has not been experienced in class so only guessing can be done on the basis of the experience obtained while working with these students.

As the experience has shown that role-playing and comics are appealing to these students, it is expected that students will enjoy the activity and strengthen the grammar involved. Furthermore, some students read some of the strips while we were preparing the activities, and they seemed to like the characters and the fact that they were able to understand most of the words.

CONCLUSION

The initial purpose of this paper was to provide teachers with some pedagogical proposals to use comics as educational tools in English as a foreign language lessons for primary education students. In order to fulfil that intention, an initial conceptualization of comics and graphic novels has been elaborated as the term has proved to be more complex to define than expected. For that reason, prior to focusing on the activities, different levels of complexity for the definitions have been established and a historical view of this medium has been included. This initial stage has shown useful to show that comics and other products similar to them involve a series of characteristics that make this a complex medium. Moreover, this initial chapter offers examples of creations which can be considered comics or not depending on the point of view of the analyst, so it has been considered that this medium is flexible enough to be used in class with students of several levels.

Moreover, the following chapters offer some examples and reasons justifying the usefulness of comics as an educational tool. From our point of view, factors such as the combination of the two codes conveying information with an important scaffolding effect (students can infer the meaning of words and expressions from the pictures), their popularity among youngsters and the kind of informal examples of conversational language prove that comics can be really useful tools to help students learn a language. In addition, the literature seems to demonstrate that the benefits of this medium can be enjoyed not only by average students, but also by low achievers and by students not interested in traditional reading. For these students, comics can be both a source of valid reading practice and an initial step towards the reading of other kinds of texts such as books. Furthermore, the use of comics to boost critical thinking and the analysis of the combination between pictures and words offers teachers tools to face the challenge of teaching students to criticize the mass media surrounding them.

While theory has shown that comics have a great potential to be used in class with several purposes and to engage students in an appealing way, for this thesis some activities were modestly designed involving the use of comics and used in class to obtain some feedback.

According to our experience, one of the most important points when designing these activities is preparation time. As there is a wide variety of comics, the contents can vary to a great extent and the language can show lots of new features, so choosing a comic requires some kind of previous research on the students' interests, skills and appealing topics. Although some of this investigation can be done by asking them, some answers can be biased because of the most recent trends and, by the time a teacher ends up preparing the activity, that topic may have lost its interest. For that reason, other more subtle approaches can be used by paying attention to clues appearing in their school supplies and clothes.

Another point learned from experience is that our students enjoyed activities based on comics even when many of them did not recognize the specific set of characters because they identified the style of the drawings with other characters they do know. In the case of activity number one, some of them identified the characters from their television series and others felt familiar with the style, so the comic was perceived both as an appealing story for those with previous knowledge and as new material for the other pupils. Nevertheless, the students enjoyed the use of this material, felt engaged in the activity and they showed interest in the use of language.

Furthermore, those students who were able to use the web tool to create comics demonstrated good skills in using and manipulating the images offered by the program and the different options to arrange them to the panels; they were really interested in that tool as a creative way to create new material with the possibility of uploading and using their own images. The main difficulty of this tool is that the use of so many pictures and visual elements requires good internet conditions as otherwise the process is too slow and discouraging

Summing up, the use of comics in this modest work has resulted in good results and good feelings at the moment of use, although preparations may require some effort and knowledge of the students. However, these problems can be solved with experience and developing some skill in "reading" our students' interests. Furthermore, comics have been proved to offer several advantages that can make the process of learning English more rewarding for young learners, so we hope that this thesis will be of help for teachers interested in using the potentialities of this versatile educational tool.

GLOSSARY

Many of the terms used in this thesis are specific from the world of comics. In order to help the reader, we have decided to add a glossary with terms related to comics; many of them are not being currently used in this thesis but they are considered useful and interesting to be included. To prepare the glossary and the definitions several sources have been consulted such as webpages (Coville, 2014; Heritage Auctions, 2004; Wood, 2015; Starkings & Roshell, 2015) and Collins' and Merriam Webster's dictionaries.

The terms listed below are grouped by categories and then ordered alphabetically.

People involved in the creation of comics.

Although some of these roles can be taken by the same person, especially with the use of digital tools facilitating the creative process, these are the main ones that can be found:

- **Colourist:** the person who gives colour to the comics, although this process was traditionally done by the use of coloured inks nowadays digital tools are used to create different effects and styles.
- **Editor:** the person who prepares the comic to be published by correcting mistakes both in writing and art, making changes or keeping the consistence with other materials revolving around the same universe of the story (other comic books, other collaborators, etc.)
- **Inker:** the person who uses ink to outline or retrace what the penciler draws in order to make the comic easier to process.
- **Letterer:** the person who takes the script of the comic and places elements related to dialogues, balloons, bubbles, sound effects, etc. in the intended places.
- **Penciler:** the person who uses the script to draw the comic in an initial stage. Later on, the pencil drawings will be inked and coloured. Corrections of this phase can be done in the following inking and colouring stages.
- **Writer:** the person who writes the story and the script of the comics and the one with the general view of the story.

Comic book formats.

Comics can be found in numerous formats according to several factors. Number of pages, topics or medium of publication can be used as criteria to classify comics according to some settled names used in the comics' worlds. Some terms (terms "comic", "comic strip" and "graphic novel") have been kept out of this section as their meaning is discussed in the chapter devoted to defining comics.

- **Adzine**: magazine advertising mainly comics and collectibles.
- **Bande dessinée**: French term for comic strip
- **Bound copy**: a comic bound into a book.
- **Collected Edition**: multiple single issues (usually 5-6) collected to create a full story or set of stories
- **Digest**: collected editions smaller in height and length. This is a usual format for manga.
- **Digital Comics**: editions designed to be viewed on computer screen or portable devices such as tablets or mobile phones.
- **Fanzine (Zine)**: amateur publications made by fans which can be called "zine" in a shortened form.
- **Hardcover (HC)**: a printed edition of a collection of issues (usually around 12 issues) whose cover has a very thick stock.
- **La nouvelle manga**: French comics which are drawn influenced by manga.
- **Limited series**: comic series with a set number of issues (usually 6 but it depends on the story) telling a whole story (involving beginning, middle and end).
- **Manga**: Japanese term for comics usually used to refer to Japanese comics and graphic novels. These comics are read from right to left, as opposed to the left to right western comics.
- **Manwha**: Korean equivalent of manga
- **Maxi-series**: a longer mini-series (see *Limited series*) (12 issues or longer but publishers can vary in the definitions)
- **Mini-comic**: a comic smaller than the conventional comic book.
- **Mini-series**: see *Limited series*

- **Omnibus:** large hardcover collections (usually more than 25 issues). These often include entire series.
- **One-shot:** a comic consisting of only one issue.
- **Original Graphic Novel (OGN):** a comic book in the trade paperback/hardcover format without being in the serial single issue format previously.
- **Prestige Edition:** comics that are generally 48-64 pages long that have a thin spine.
- **Single Issue:** the serial magazine style format of a comic (usually 20-32 pages of story but some up to 100 pages).
- **Trade Paperback (TPB):** the most common type of collected edition (usually 5-8 single issues) in a paperback format and can be often referred to as a “trade”.
- **Webcomic:** comics made for viewing on the Internet

Structure of comics.

Comics use some elements to structure their narration which are quite specific of this medium. Many of them have been mentioned and used in this thesis so the reader may have inferred their meaning but they are relevant enough to appear here as a form of clarification.

- **Balloon:** an outline usually in a circular or elliptical form used to enclose the spoken words or the thoughts of the characters in the cartoons. It can be also called “bubble”
- **Bubble:** see *Balloon*.
- **Burst:** a balloon with saw-like lines used to indicate screaming.
- **Frame:** it can refer to the enclosing border of a panel but it is usually used as a synonym for panel.
- **Panel:** each one of the boxes in which the pictures or drawings of comics usually appear.
- **Tail** (a.k.a. “pointer”) it is the pointed part of a balloon indicating who is speaking or thinking. It can point to the mouth or the character in general. Tails can vary to show characteristics of the message, such as tails with a lightning form to express anger or to indicate that the sounds comes from an electronic device.

- **Thought balloon:** cloudy shaped balloons with three or four circles pointing to the thinker instead of using a tail.

Other terms.

Many other terms are used in the world of comics and, as they are not so easy to classify in categories bigger enough to facilitate the reference, those terms are shown below in alphabetical order.

- **Splash page:** a panel consisting in a whole page. First pages are usually designed as splash pages including credits and titles.
- **Zero issue:** an issue serving as a prelude for a series.
- **Floppies:** slang term for single issues.
- **CCA:** abbreviation of Comic Code Authority.
- **Complete run:** all the issues of one single title.
- **Paneologist:** a person who studies comics and comic strips.
- **Spine:** the edge of the comic folded and stapled.

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ANNEX I: Materials for “Activity 1”

The next page shows the page of the comic *Teen Titans Go!* used for the first activity because of its contents and drawing style and a worksheet for the students.

It has been taken from: <http://teentitanscomic.blogspot.com.es/2014/01/teen-titans-go-46-wildfire.html>





Royal Tamarean Family



EXPLAIN: Look at the pictures of the family tree and the comic on the screen and describe Starfire's family. You can use the following terms.

Younger brother	Older sister	Dark-haired	Red-haired
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TELL THE STORY: Look at the comic and use your own words to describe the events in the comic. Then read the comic and check your guess.

EXPRESSIONS: Link the expression from the comic with their meaning.

Bad seed of the family

Really sad and depressed

To be crushed

A bad person

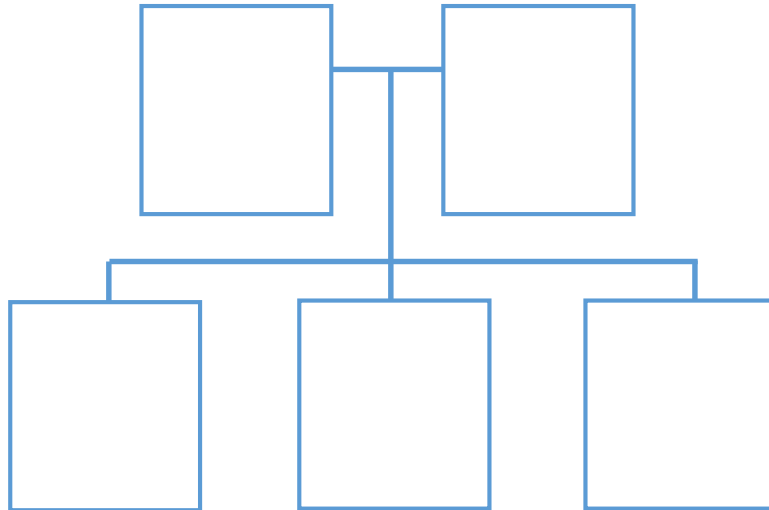
Take over

If it is needed

Just in case

To conquer, to control.

IMAGINE: Create an imaginary family and describe it. Try to use some of the expressions from below. You can use this family tree to take notes.



GUESS: Read the comic again and look at the next pictures. They are panels from the same comic. Try to guess what happens in the story.



The story continues on:

<http://teentitanscomic.blogspot.com.es/2014/01/teen-titans-go-46-wildfire.html>

ANNEX II: Creating support comics

In this annex we include the indications for the activity of creation of comics using a web-tool. Additionally, some information and materials for the creation of the previous dialogues are added.

Firstly, we talked about the chart with the general information about the means of transport, the codes that we decided to use (smileys and trees) and some other indications they needed about ways to calculate times or to measure distances on maps. In addition, the visual dictionary helped us to explain those means of transport (the difference between boat and speedboat was easier to understand with those images). After that, they worked with a map of the city and rulers in order to decide the means of transport and their route. With that information they elaborated the conversation they were going to play at the end of the activity. In order to help them with this stage, we gave them some examples of conversations they used as models (one of them has been included in this annex).

The second part of this activity is the creation of the support comics to illustrate their conversations. Our intention was that the students could create images to show the situation they were playing to their classmates. Furthermore, those comics would have served as a visual aid for their classmates and as reminders or “notes”.

The instructions to use ToonDoo are included in the next annex and could be given to them before or during the activity.

Their comics should have an opening panel to introduce the characters to the classmates and to identify the students with their comic versions (as they can create personalised characters as shown in the third annex) and a closing panel with the means of transport chosen. In order to complete their comics, the rest of the intermediate panels are quite free as the students can choose the amount of panels and their contents. A couple of examples (created by the author of this thesis) of how these comics could result are added below, although, in order to simplify, they are created with two characters.

The first of these examples has three panels summarizing one possible situation. The first panel acts as an introduction where a tourist arrives to the part-time tourist office in the school. The second panel shows the different means of transport suggested by the girl

to the boy in the cartoon and discussed (in this example we show the means of transport instead of the amount of time needed or the prize). Finally, the last panel shows the last means of transport mentioned in the conversation and the decision of the tourist to use that. This example is simpler than the ones our students should create as it only involves two characters (our students should work in groups of three or four) and has only two words. Our students could create several of this sequences or even a comic book with several pages (see Annex III). However, as the situation is being role played by the students, this medium offers a visual background where the contents of the dialogue are contained and can be pointed to.

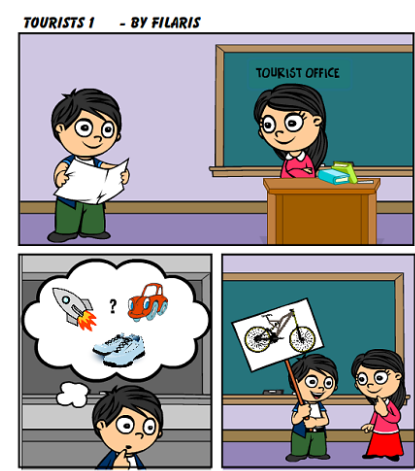


Image 8: Example of a simple comic created with ToonDoo.

This example shows that these comics can involve lots of information and visual help with only some pictures that can be created in quite a short time. Furthermore, this tool also allows users to add speech balloons if they want to show what is being said. This could be useful to show how emotions evolve during the conversation or to have some parts of the conversation written (something that is interesting to emphasise some expression or structure used by some of the groups). The next example illustrates how dialogues can be added with different kinds of balloons and expressions. The combination of the text and the images may help students to infer the meaning of “too expensive” even if they do not know or recognise the expression.

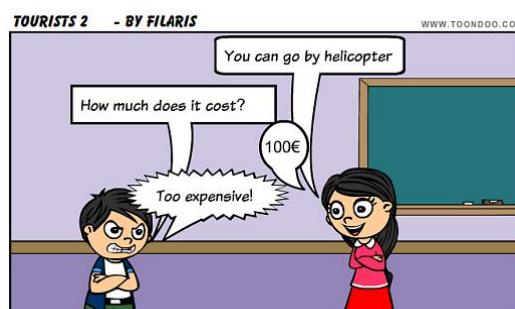


Image 9: Example of panel made with ToonDoo with different kinds of balloons and expressions.

Finally, single panels like the one above have the advantage that they can be created and saved faster than strips with several panels and are quite easy to combine in a kind of comic book.

Some tourists want to visit Santander. They come to our school because they need some advice. They want to go to Magdalena Palace and each one of them wants different things.

The travel agents are going to help them.

Travel agent 1: Calculates prizes and distance

Travel agent 2: Talks to the tourists

Tourist 1: Wants to travel in a very cool 😎 way.

Tourist 2: Is very mean, doesn't want to spend a lot of money.

Tourist 3: Wants to travel ecologically 🌳

Mean of transport	Price	Coolness level	Time	Conditions
By rocket	500€	😎😎😎	5 minutes	Launch from the rocket station ⁹ .
By boat	40€	😎	15 minutes	From the coast to the coast.
By speedboat	50€	😎😎	5 minutes	From the coast to the coast.
On foot	free	🌳🌳🌳	60m/min	
By bus	1,30€	🌳	500m/min	
By taxi	1.5€ + 1€/m	😎	750m/min	
By bike	2€	🌳🌳😎	350m/min	
By helicopter	100€	😎😎	10 minutes	From a park to a park



→ Looks cool



→ ecologically cool

⁹ "Escenario Santander" en "Las Llamas"

MEANS OF TRANSPORT - Pictionary

BY AIR



PLANE



HELICOPTER



ROCKET



HOT AIR
BALLOON



BLIMP



UFO



HANG GLIDER



PARACHUTE



AIRCRAFT

BY LAND



CAR



POLICE CAR



TAXI



AMBULANCE



TRUCK



BUS



FIRE ENGINE



RACE CAR



JEEP



BIKE



SKATEBOARD



SLEDGE



ROLLER SKATES



MOTOR HOME



VAN



TRICYCLE



MOTORBIKE



TRACTOR

BY SEA



SHIP



SAIL BOAT



KAYAK



CANOE



SPEED BOAT



SUBMARINE

BY RAIL



TRAM



TRAIN



SUBWAY

iSLCollective.com

Example:

Tourists: Hello, good morning.

Agent 1: Hello. Can I help you?

Tourist 1: Yes, I want to go to Magdalena Palace.

Tourist 2: Is it near or far?

Agent 1: It is far. Look. 25 centimetres on the map.
1 cm is 150 real metres
 $25\text{cm} \times 150\text{m/cm} = 3750 \text{ m} = 3.75 \text{ km}$

Agent 2: You can go by helicopter.

Tourist 2: How much does it cost?

Agent 2: It costs 100€

Tourist 2: It is too expensive

Agent 1: You can go on foot.

Tourist 1: Is it fast?

Agent 2: No, $3750 \text{ m} / 60 \text{ m/min} = 62 \text{ minutes}$.
It is almost one hour.

Tourist 1: Can we go by bike?

Agent 1: Bikes are cool and cheap

Tourist 2: Is it expensive?

Agent 2: Only 2€

Tourist 1: Is it fast?

Agent 1: Let's see, wait a minute

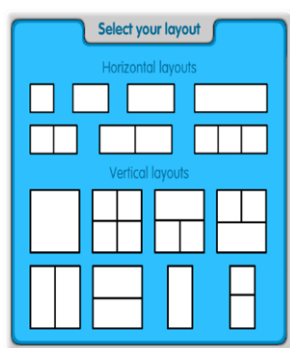
Agent 2: $3750 \text{ minutes} / 350\text{m/s} = 10 \text{ minutes}$

Tourists: Ok. We'll go by bike. Thank you!

ANNEX III: Instructions for ToonDoo

- (1) Go to **ToonDoo** and **log in** clicking on the top right corner of the screen. Then open the drop-down menu called **“Toons”** and click on **“Create toon”**.

Other interesting menus are **“Books”** and **“Dooers”**. The first can be used to create a comic book and in the second we can edit our profile and create our own avatar.



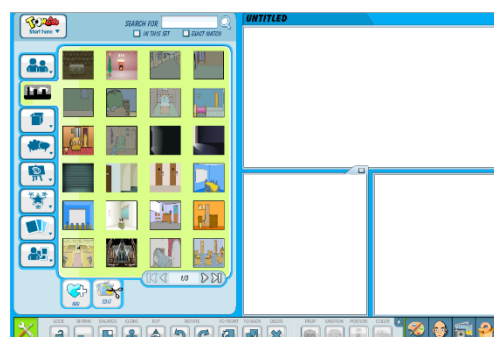
- (2) A screen showing different layouts should appear. **Choose** the structure that you want to use. If you want to use more than 3 panels you should choose horizontal layouts.

This webpage offers two kinds of layouts, vertical and horizontal.

Only **horizontal layouts** can be turned into a **comic book**.

- (3) The screen should change and show the tools available to create comics.

On the **left side** of the screen you can find the **elements** of the comics: characters, backgrounds, props, texts and speech balloons, other artworks and options to add other drawings and images from your own computer or database.



The **horizontal bar** at the bottom of the screen displays **options to modify** the elements added (rotate, change size, copy, move to the front or to the back of the image or change colour, postures and expression).



- (4) Click on the **speech bubbles button** to add texts. A new menu allows you to use default styles or to personalise your own using the tools at the bottom of the screen.

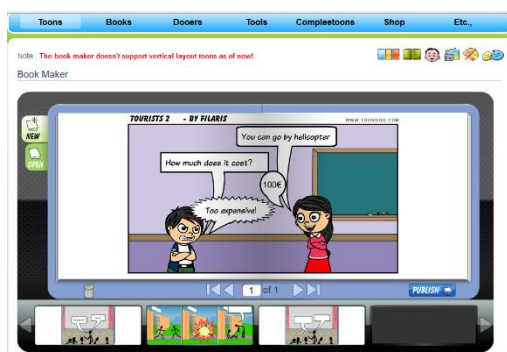
Once you have chosen a speech balloon, drag it on the screen, add your text and modify it to adapt the balloon to your panel.

- (5) Repeat the previous stages until you create your own comic or panel, then click on the button at the top left corner and click on **save**. The screenshot to the right shows different options and information you can complete and click on “**publish**” to save it.



- (6) If you choose **horizontal layouts**, the screen changes but keeps the same tools although the vertical menus are now at the top of the screen. This image also shows one single panel with different examples of speech bubbles.

- (7) After saving the comic, you can go to the main page, open “Toons” menu and click on “MyToonDoos”. There you can find **all your creations** and click on any of them to see them as shown below with some tools to share it.



- (8) If you are using **horizontal layouts**, you can create a **comic book** going to the menu called “books”. Then drag you panels from the bottom bar to the page of the book to create a comic books. This book allows you to flip pages using the cursor on the screen.

- (9) Another additional tool that you can use is “**traitR**” (the button with a bald head) to create **personalised characters**. This tool allows you to modify bodies, positions, gestures and colours and you can keep those characters for your panels.



ANNEX IV: Comic strips for “Activity 3”

The next page shows several comic strips from *Calvin and Hobbes* chosen for the last activity. Those strips have been chosen according to grammar (tenses), content and situations.

They have been taken from: <http://www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes/>

